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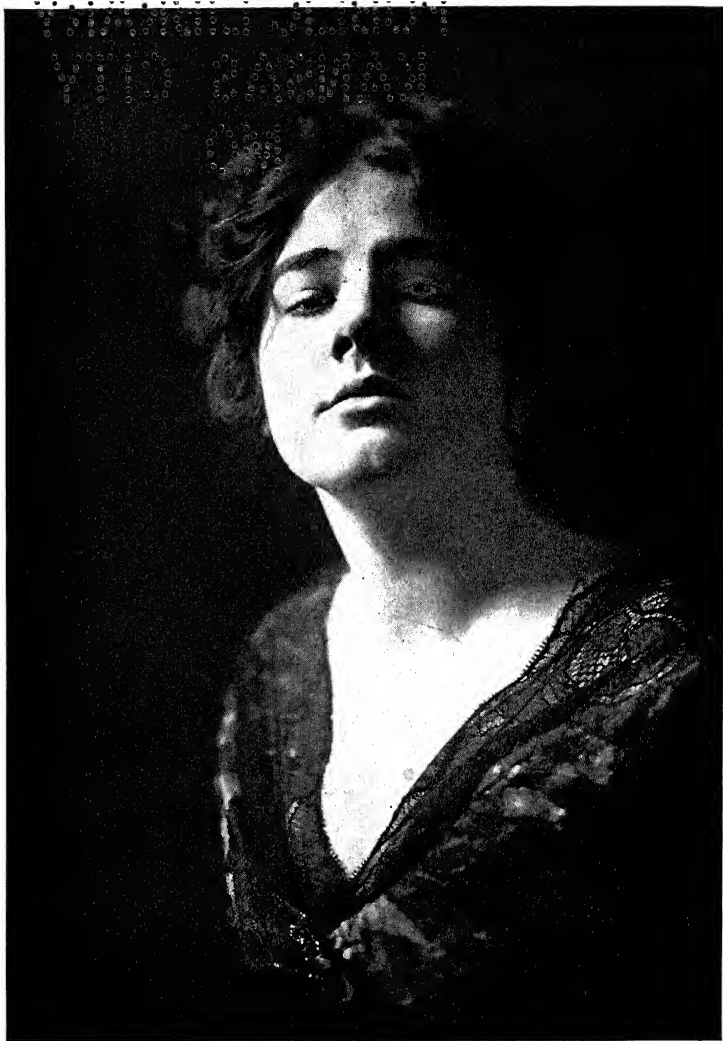


LIFE WAS LIKE THAT









CECIL B. DE MILLE'S LEADING LADY: MARY DOYLE AS 'RUTH  
ROGER'

L I F E  
W A S  
L I K E  
T H A T

MARY DOYLE

BOSTON AND NEW YORK  
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY  
*The Riverside Press Cambridge*  
1936

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# 1

## WORKING GIRL

### I

GIRLS WANTED to count tobacco coupons. No previous experience necessary. Apply FLORODORA TAG COMPANY, No. xx Seventh Avenue. \$4.

MOTHER said very little about it. But I knew she had been clinging grimly, desperately — and, I knew also, hopelessly — to the dream of seeing me through high school.

None of us, indeed, discussed the matter at all. This wasn't because as a family we were in the slightest degree inarticulate. On the contrary; when we three sisters, or even two of us, were at home there was never a moment's letup in the chatter. And Mother for her part loved gossip as dearly as any of her neighbors in what then was still Irish Harlem.

But chatter and gossip were purely for entertainment — in fact, our basic, staple form of that necessity. The serious issues of life were invariably met and dealt with wholly without speech.

In those days we never discussed the really important things; in these, it sometimes seems to me, too many people never get beyond discussing them. But the reason

we didn't discuss them was that it never occurred to us that there was anything to discuss.

Life's inevitables, in Irish Harlem thirty-odd years ago, were so clear and familiar that they never had to be mentioned. It never even went as far as right and wrong; at every important point there simply was just one thing to do, so you did it.

And nobody had to explain what that one thing was to a thirteen-year-old girl whose eldest sister was a stenographer at twelve dollars a week; whose second sister was a milliner's apprentice; and whose widowed mother was stoically watching two thousand dollars of insurance money dwindle steadily toward zero.

Social security, even as a phrase, hadn't yet been coined; and if it had, we wouldn't have understood it. The only social security we knew was the possession of some kind of job. But among those inevitables of ours was also a conviction, which in that vanished world actually had foundation, that when you needed a job you could find one, if you made an honest try.

So the day after I finished grammar school, without saying one word either to Mother or my sisters I bought a copy of the *World* and set to work on the 'Help Wanted — Female' columns. What I found was the advertisement at the head of this chapter.

Nobody had to explain to me, either, what '\$4' meant. To add 'a week' would have been a wholly needless expense.

Next morning, with a tearfully hovering mother giving anxious little last-minute jerks and pats to a newly let-down skirt and newly put-up braids, I left our top-floor flat in West 115th Street, ran down four flights of carpeted, gas-lighted stairs, and scurried toward Eighth

Avenue, half a block away, and the 116th Street elevated station.

I can still feel the sharp tingle of the wintry air on my flaming cheeks, and hear the ring of my hurrying feet on the flagstones, that February morning so long ago. It was the first time in my life I ever rode alone on the L. My cheeks were still hot, and my eyes, I don't doubt, saucer-like, when at last I reached Sixth Avenue and Twenty-Third Street. There was no subway then, nor any elevated express trains, either.

I was just six months past thirteen — a gawky youngster in deep mourning. I had on button shoes that came well up over my ankles, and a skirt (with a Heather-bloom petticoat under it) that hung accurately even with my shoetops.

My black winter coat came to just below my hips; or at least to just below where my hips would have been had I possessed any. It looked — at any distance over fifty yards — quite a lot like fur; it was really caracul cloth. It had a high, snug collar, and sleeves with sharply pointed shoulders. It was hourglass-shaped at the waist, but such skirt as it had flared out determinedly.

Under it I wore a black sateen shirtwaist with a high stock, around which was carefully wound a broad black ribbon tied with a bow under the left side of my chin. And on my head, pinned to two coils of braided and rolled-up yellow hair, was a broad, black, flat, straight-brimmed sailor hat.

Huddled under my coat where, I fervently prayed, no one would notice it, was a little paper bundle of sandwiches and an orange — my lunch. For if I got the job I might have to go right to work, and restaurant lunches are not bought out of four dollars a week. But well did I

know that the most tremendous and deep-cutting social distinction among working girls was between those who carried their lunches and those who bought them.

My oldest sister, who was a business-college graduate and a full-fledged stenographer, could not have brought a lunch to the office with her; she would have become thereby immediately and definitely *déclassée*. But I, starting on a far lower rung of the ladder, could only dream, like twenty other youngsters in that same elevated car, that nobody would see our telltale little packages, and that someone might take us too for stenographers.

The Florodora Tag Company was on the east side of Seventh Avenue just south of Twenty-Third Street. It was merely a name concealing the issuing depot of the coupon-premium department of the American Tobacco Company, whose offices were two blocks east, on Fifth Avenue.

The Florodora office had been created simply by throwing two adjoining small retail stores into one. The door which had been that of the left-hand shop was for customers, the right-hand one for employees. Along the line where the partition had been was a high wooden counter, with a brass netting above it which reached to the ceiling and contained a row of little wickets. On high stools behind some of these wickets sat girls of about my own age. Across the rear, at half the depth of the room, was a lower open counter, at which several older girls were busily wrapping packages and handing them out to queues of men that were steadily recruited from the other lines at the wickets.

In the middle of the floor was a railed-in information desk. The young woman behind it listened in bored in-

difference to my timorous inquiry, and sent me out to re-enter by the employees' door. Once through this, I found myself in the rear of the high counter, the row of stools, and the girls perched upon them.

Directly before me was a plain flat-topped desk; and behind this desk, with his feet upon it, lolled a red-faced man in a derby hat, who calmly looked me over. From that instant I hated him with all my narrow young puritanically trained Irish heart — which I think now was probably unjust.

My examination took scarcely thirty seconds.

'What's your name? Where do you live? How old are you?' I knew the answer I was expected to give to this last. Such knowledge was breathed in with the air of Harlem streets. 'Sixteen.' That this was a lie, Mr. Benson was certainly as well aware as I; but the law required him to exact it. There were no working papers in those days.

He motioned with his head to a gentle-faced, plainly dressed woman who had come forward from the rear of the room and was standing a little behind his shoulder.

'Put her to work.'

I had my first job. I was shown where to hang my coat and hat and stow my luncheon package. In another thirty seconds I was perched on a stool behind one of the previously vacant wickets; my only instructions were to watch the girl beside me and learn what she was doing and how she did it.

By early afternoon I had already started, slowly and fumblingly at first, counting the endless, grimy masses of coupons; and within a week I had settled down so thoroughly into the life of a 'working girl' that school-

days and hopscotch on the sidewalk seemed remote as a dream.

## II

On the whole, I liked it. The thrill of being an earner, I found, was a lasting one; and at home my status had improved, literally overnight, in a tremendous and gratifying fashion.

Instead of seeing my sisters off and then helping Mother until time for school, I too could march forth with them right after breakfast, and scramble like any grown-up young woman for a seat on the L. The luncheon package, to be sure, was a daily humiliation, but one that I was grimly determined should not continue long. And though, instead of being foot-loose at three, I didn't get home now until after six, it was worth it to know that little-girl chores and errands were behind me for good and all.

Better still, my evenings and Sundays took on a new importance and value. I began to take my first small and timid steps in the social life of 115th Street; to refuse to accept, any longer, my big sisters' contemptuous dismissal as 'the kid'; and to assert my claim to some, at least, of the privileges of young ladyhood. It must be distinctly understood that in 115th Street you lost no social prestige by 'going out to work'; on the contrary you gained it, however humble your 'business job' might be.

And the social life of 115th Street was as real as — in fact, probably in many ways more genuinely and wholeheartedly enjoyed by those who shared in it than — its counterpart on Fifth Avenue.

I never have, for example, had one-tenth as much fun and excitement from any motor ride that ever came my way as we used to get out of streetcar excursions.

Each Sunday afternoon from May to October, if the weather was fine, found my next oldest sister and myself hurrying out as soon as the dinner dishes were done — sailor hats bobbing, petticoats rustling, cheeks aflame; the final touch of Sunday-best smartness furnished by a bunch of tulle tied in a rosette under each left ear, where it produced an effect somewhat similar to the tail-light of a rabbit.

Almost invariably, within a few steps of our front door we would be caught up by groups of other girls, neighbors and former school chums, all hastening in the same direction and with the same purpose in mind. And this was our thrilling enterprise:

Arrived at the corner of 116th Street and Eighth Avenue, you stood and waited for a downtown Eighth Avenue open car. If the first that came along had its front seat — the one just behind the motorman — already occupied, you waited until one came along that hadn't. Then you mounted breathlessly, with giggles and squeals, and, with mighty clangings of the gong, careered away — down the whole stretch of Central Park West, through Columbus Circle, and on and on, all the way to Twenty-Third Street. (We never quite dared to prolong the ride still farther, as we could easily have done, by venturing into the remote, strange, and perilous territory of Fourteenth Street.)

As Twenty-Third Street drew near, you demanded transfers from the conductor, who handed them out with a wink; for he too knew the game. You presented these to the conductor of the Twenty-Third Street cross-town



car. That was a short ride; the real fun began again when, once more securing transfers, you descended at Fourth Avenue and embarked upon an uptown open Madison Avenue car — again refusing to be content with anything but the front seat.

There was no park view on the Madison Avenue line; but to offset this there was first the thrill of bowling, at the hair-raising speed of fifteen miles an hour, through the cool, dim, and echoing old tunnel from Thirty-Third to Forty-Second Street — with the motorman beating out a solo on his gong purely for our delectation — and then that of whisking around the corners, first into Forty-Second Street and then into Madison Avenue, past the huge red-brick pile of the old Grand Central Station and the wonderful new Hotel Manhattan.

There were some glorious hills, too, on Madison Avenue, before, all too soon, we reached 116th Street. Transfers again; and the 116th Street cross-town car took you back to your starting-point — where yet another set of transfers, requested as demurely as any of their predecessors, permitted you to embark upon a second round.

Those of us possessing sufficient impudence (of whom I was one) not infrequently succeeded in accomplishing the circuit three times in a single Sunday afternoon — a ride of something over thirty miles — at the total cost of one nickel plus eleven successive free transfers.

More thrilling still were those red-letter Sundays when Tom Whitney, whose father had a 'very fine job' with the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, or some other young man equally well able to pass Mother's rigid and, rather terrifying inspection, shyly proposed an excursion, and took you all the way to South Ferry on the

Eighth Avenue car, there to bestow upon you the ultimate in Sunday treats — a round trip to Staten Island on the ferryboat.

But that was too much to hope for more than once or twice in a season. To be sure, in those days you were allowed to stay right on the boat at the Staten Island terminal, and so enjoy the round trip — half an hour down the bay and half an hour back — for a nickel apiece. But your escort must not only pay for both, but full fare for two each way on the streetcar; and when you add another nickel apiece for ice-cream sodas, plainly the entertainment of a lady soon ran into money.

Whatever the excursion for the day might be, it must be completed by sundown Sunday evening. For nobody who was anybody in Irish Harlem would ever run the slightest risk of missing the Sunday evening promenade on Seventh Avenue.

The earliest promenaders began to appear not long after four; and it was well on toward nine before the final stragglers departed. But our particular 'set' waited until after supper, and reached the avenue at about half-past seven. By that time the function — and a function it was, no less! — was sure to be in full swing.

At that hour on any fine Sunday evening, from early spring until late in the fall, there was only one place in which to look for the beauty and the chivalry of Harlem. Both those terms, incidentally, are used advisedly, and in their most literal sense; for the operation of livery stables was still one of the chief activities of our neighborhood, and both their proprietors and their employees were among our most esteemed and substantial citizens.

And that one place was the west sidewalk of Seventh Avenue, from 110th to 125th Street. Why it must always

be the west side only was then and still is a mystery to me. The fact remains that so it was. Even families living on the east side of the avenue must needs cross over to join in the ceremony.

The western sidewalk was packed from doorsteps to curb with people in their Sunday best — each family in its own compact group; all moving in the same direction at the same unhurried pace; all complying meticulously with the same unwritten rules.

Even in joining the procession you must observe due formality. You waited politely, occasionally bowing and smiling to acquaintances as they passed, at the corner of your own street. Presently a group of your own nearer friends came by and, by gesture and by pausing to make room, invited you to join them. With more bows and smiles, and properly dignified greetings, you swung into line and moved forward with them.

Conversation, in the course of the promenade, was far from the carefree chatter that went on among the groups of your own age, in your own home or your friends'. It was deliberate, even intermittent, low-voiced and restrained; and leaned heavily upon the two topics of the weather and the current state of the respective promenaders' health.

But the real interest of the ceremony began with the northward journey. The southward stream, into which you first insinuated yourself, flowed along the inner half of the sidewalk to 110th Street; but there you swung around, almost in ordered ranks, and found yourself now close to the outer edge of the sidewalk.

And here, along the curb, at the street-corners, around the lampposts, the young men were congregated. Young men in derby hats, or in 'straws' with extraordinarily

low flat crowns and far-extending brims and occasionally a gay-colored hat-band; young men in remarkably tight-fitting suits of ready-made blue serge whose lapels were so short they barely permitted a glimpse of a gorgeous puffed-out silk necktie with a 'diamond' horseshoe pin; young men very much on their good behavior, who gazed upon you solemnly, in silence, and whose very existence you for your part were extremely careful to ignore.

Once in a very long while, perhaps, some unusually daring youth who had been permitted by a girl's family to claim her acquaintance might step forward with lifted hat and engage her in a few moments' conversation; but the slow-moving, densely packed procession soon took her away. To have joined her in the promenade would have been tantamount to publishing the banns then and there; or at the very least would have been public announcement that they were 'keeping steady company.'

As it was, not even the briefest greeting escaped the watchful eyes of the matrons in the apartment-house windows overhead who lined the entire fifteen blocks like sentinels, each comfortably ensconced in her chosen observation post, her elbow cushion on the ledge. No landlord with an apartment overlooking that stretch of sidewalk need ever fear having it long vacant on his hands. And when it came to the prompt dissemination of even the tiniest morsel of neighborhood news, we had no need of telephone or radio.

### III

Those Sunday evenings were the climax of our social life outside the home. I do not believe a single boy or girl

of my acquaintance in those days had so much as seen the inside of a theater. We found or created our own entertainment, chiefly within our homes; and much of it was musical. But it was our own music.

I am sure there was not a family on our block so poor as to lack its piano, or so small as to lack at least one daughter who had 'taken lessons' and could thump with a right good will. Nor did ever an evening pass, the year around, when there would not be heard in our apartment-house, coming from at least one and usually from several flats at once, sundry young voices — baritone, tenor, contralto, and soprano — dealing lustily and not untunefully with 'She Lives in a Mansion of Aching Hearts'; 'Ring Down the Curtain'; 'My Mother Was a Lady'; and even such slightly daring ditties as 'She's My Filipino Baby.'

But for the real heads of Harlem households the one great social hour of the day was signaled by the janitor's ring for the garbage.

It was then that every dumb-waiter door in the building opened spontaneously and simultaneously; and then that, leaning on the sills, waiting comfortably for their respective turns and for their pails to be returned, everybody chatted comfortably with everybody else — Mrs. McGuire and Mrs. Keogh, Mrs. McGowan and Mrs. Donovan, and so on down, floor by floor, with greetings and questions and answers flying up, down, and across the narrow, echoing shaft.

Do you begin to get the feel of this placid and kindly community, comfortably encysted in the midst of a vast organism to which we never gave a thought? We were, of course, all well aware that miles on miles of crowded buildings lay all about us, many of them inhabited by

tribes as strange to us in appearance and language as could have been found at the uttermost ends of the earth. But none of this touched us in the least. Not one family in ten among us so much as took a newspaper regularly. We did not, and that very copy of the *World* in which I found my first job had to be specially bought for the purpose.

What we were doing, of course, as I realize now, was conforming in all ways that the city would permit us to the pattern of village life. I could in time think of a hundred quaint instances of this. We did not even lack the village blacksmith; the favorite resort of the school children in the afternoons was Hines's blacksmith shop. I myself must have stopped scores of times to 'look in at the open door' and watch, fascinated, while young Jimmy Hines helped his father fit new shoes to a team of huge Percherons.

But the village pattern faded out imperceptibly into the pattern of the city; the Hines family lived in a huge red brick apartment-house on the corner of 115th Street and Eighth Avenue, two flights up, above the saloon; the elder Hines was our local district leader, and young Jimmy, our sometime schoolmate, was destined to succeed him and become a power in the inner circles of Tammany Hall.

And as far as I myself was concerned, though half my life might be (without my ever realizing the fact) that of a 'simple village maiden,' as soon as I went to work I became, like every other Harlem working girl, a denizen of two worlds. And the Twenty-Third Street world of my job supplied a wholly different array of pleasures and problems from those I knew at home.

To begin with what was to me, naturally, the least

important part of it, the work itself was neither particularly exciting nor intellectually exacting. Each day it seemed to demand a smaller and smaller portion of my youthful attention and energies.

The equipment for coupon-counting consisted of a big basket under the counter into which we tossed the counted bundles of coupons; a premium book in which we verified the customer's right to the premiums for which he asked; a pad of premium order slips, and a pencil.

Only one day was needed to make the discovery that a certain percentage of the customers could be depended upon to ask, innocently or otherwise, for more, or more expensive, premiums than their coupons entitled them to claim; and that a small but definite percentage of this group would take your refusal with a very ill grace, and even attempt to bully you.

The first few times this happened were trying and even terrifying, but again brought a further discovery — that the hated Mr. Benson had had ample experience with such problems, and that the machinery for disposing of the belligerent objector was prompt and efficient. After that the occasional disputes became welcome breaks in the monotony. And within three or four days you knew the premium book by heart, and needed it only to show to the customer when these arguments did arise.

Easy and simple as the work was, it gradually developed two trials, a big one and a little one.

The big one was the unbelievably filthy, ragged, and foul-smelling condition of practically all the coupons I had to handle and count, and the almost equally unwashed and malodorous state of the people who presented them. But my disgust, it might as well be confessed, was

not based wholly on sanitary grounds. It had its snobbish side.

The greater part of it was honest revulsion against uncleanness. Our mother had always, however narrow our straits or difficult our circumstances, clung fiercely to her own standard of decency in living. She would work until four o'clock in the morning if necessary, and then get up at half-past six to get breakfast, if thereby she might be sure that her home was always meticulously clean and her three daughters not only neat but as dainty as her hard-worked fingers could keep them. I still remember vividly the shock with which I realized, during those first days of my first job, that large numbers of human beings actually didn't mind being dirty.

But my resentment at the uncouth creatures who crowded up to my wicket was not all because of the dirt they compelled me to share. We had our social as well as our sanitary standards. We lived in a 'railroad flat'; but every one of us would have been insulted had you called it a tenement. In the school days I had just left behind me, we had played hopscotch and skipped rope on the sidewalks; but not for anything would we have danced on them to hurdy-gurdy music, the way tenement children did.

Not only had I absorbed all the customs and taboos of 115th Street; I was old enough to remember a still earlier childhood in old Newburgh, up the Hudson, where we had been people of assured social position, and both my father and my grandfather had been men of substance and standing in the community. And at thirteen it was a bitter thing that my father's daughter could find no better occupation than counting coupons for 'a lot of dirty kikes and guineas.' (They didn't become 'wops' for another seven or eight years.)



My second trial had to do with the social life of the office — that is to say, its real life, as distinguished from the mere work that went on in it. It was concerned with my boss's attitude; or rather with what I had from that first day assumed to be his attitude, and the effect produced thereby upon a thirteen-year-old mind in which had been inculcated an elaborate pattern of ideas regarding the respect and deference due one of my sex from the vastly inferior male.

As I have already told, my highly sensitized gorge began to rise from that first moment when Mr. Benson sat calmly, his feet on the desk and his hat on his head, and coolly inspected me. It went, day by day, steadily higher as I learned that I must work under his constant scrutiny.

My grievance, moreover, received re-enforcement as I learned, in the process of getting acquainted with my fellow-workers, that they all shared it, and for the same reasons.

Not one of us, of course, had the faintest comprehension of the problems, the responsibilities, or the technique of managing a mechanism in which each of us was but one small cog. All that we saw was that Mr. Benson lounged at his desk all day long, and watched every tiniest move we made. That he must be constantly alert to the manner in which each of his subordinates did her work, in order to keep the depot running smoothly; to prevent, or at least quickly clear up, disputes that jammed the even flow past the wickets and the premium counter; and to see, above all, that each transaction was promptly and properly entered so that the records would always be straight — all this, naturally, never occurred to us.

Each one of us had come from a home in which she had

been carefully imbued with the idea that when a man stared at you it was insulting, and his intentions were probably evil (evil in what respect, our mothers refrained from ever specifying; but that added the impressiveness of mystery to the lesson).

Probably Mr. Benson was only one of many thousands of office managers of those times who suffered without knowing why, and whose patience was often most unfairly tried, by the discrepancy between the requirements of business routine and discipline, and those of the code in which their female subordinates had been all too thoroughly trained — forgotten martyrs of social progress!

In retrospect Mr. Benson seems not merely harmless, but probably a far more efficient manager, underneath his apparent easy-going indifference and good nature, than it occurred to me then to consider him. And perhaps one of the best indications of his real capacity to fill a post of the peculiar difficulties this one offered was his handling of a situation that at the time infuriated us youngsters even more than his watchfulness.

#### IV

This was a situation created by the most conspicuous member of the force of premium wrappers. This group of workers was of course a step above us counter girls in the office hierarchy. They were grown women; they were better paid (they earned, I think, from six to eight dollars a week); and instead of filthy coupons, they had to handle only clean merchandise and wrapping paper. But they were a colorless lot; all, that is, except one.

And this exception was unwillingly admired, envied, hated, and despised by all the rest of us.

I've often wondered since what the poor soul's life was really like. The obvious inference, from her costume and make-up (she was the first woman I ever saw who to my knowledge 'painted her face'), and still more from her behavior toward Mr. Benson, was all too easy to draw. But I was too young and ignorant to draw it then; and I am too old and I hope too tolerant to draw it dogmatically now. After all, if she really was the first of the many, many 'fancy women' whose paths have at one time or another crossed mine, what was she doing working in that place nine hours a day for perhaps eight dollars a week?

To thirteen-year-old me she was a puzzling, perilous, and gorgeously beautiful creature, at once repellent and fascinating. She possessed an hour-glass waist and 'Grecian bend' rivaling Lillian Russell's. In fact, so pronounced were her feminine curves and carriage that part of her mystery, to me, was in her remaining upright at all; her center of gravity seemed so far beyond the perpendicular. This effect of insecurity was accentuated by the enormous structure of glitteringly blonde hair that crowned her.

As she clicked here and there about the office upon her grotesquely high heels, my eyes, whenever I could safely take them from my work, followed her with a fearful fascination. More than once I sacrificed part of my precious lunch hour to tag unobtrusively behind her on the street, and watch how almost every man she passed turned to look after her.

Naturally, watching her as I did, it did not take me long to see that she never overlooked the frailest excuse

to brush alluringly against Mr. Benson. And this, coupled with his attitude toward it, threw me into still further emotional upheavals. Convinced as I was of his depravity, I could not see how he could possibly resist her blandishments; and when he entirely ignored them, as he uniformly and invariably did, this merely meant to me and my fellow-youngsters that to the other counts against him must be added that of hypocrisy.

Now I am not so sure. In fact, the possibility has occurred to me that there might have been nothing worse than considerable worldly wisdom, tact, and patience, and perhaps even a gleam of philosophy and kindness, behind his seeming unconsciousness of anything untoward in her behavior.

But to my ferocious young intolerance the combination of 'such goings-on' behind my back with the unending smelly procession before me gradually became too much to be endured. It wasn't the desire for more money that stirred my young ambitions; it was the hunger to escape from the hated conditions. But where could I find a way out?

Little by little, as I shyly won my way into confidential acquaintance with the other girls, I learned the background of the office, and explored its possibilities for promotion. They weren't remarkable. For two weeks, indeed, I substituted for the girl at the information desk during her vacation; but that soon ended, and back I went to coupon counting. And even if it had been permanent, neither promotion to the information desk nor merely to premium wrapping would have satisfied me. My whole youthfully snobbish heart was set upon escape from the dreary, dingy premium depot to a 'nicer' place.

Finally, as we ate our lunch together one day, the girl at the wicket next to mine let fall a casual bit of information wholly new to me, to which I listened eagerly. I had, of course, learned before this that the Florodora Tag Company was merely the name of this department of the American Tobacco Company, though why the disguise was thought necessary I neither knew then nor know now. But I did learn that the company, besides using the Florodora depot to give out premiums in merchandise, would, if the coupon-holder preferred, send him his premium's cash value.

The important point about this for me was that I also learned that these money premiums were paid directly from the main office, and that a staff of girls was employed there to write out checks for them. All you needed, the other girl told me, was to be able to write a good clear hand at high speed. Another girl who had been employed in the Florodora depot before me had been promoted to the check-writing department.

She was now getting six dollars a week; but she had reported back what meant far more than the increased pay to me — that the check writers worked in a department entirely by themselves, with a woman supervisor; they had a big, clean, well-lighted office, and, most important of all, they merely wrote the checks; they had neither to count dirty coupons nor to deliver the checks in person to the objectionable recipients.

It took me perhaps two weeks to digest this information and gather sufficient courage to ask Mr. Benson for time off in which to go over to the Fifth Avenue offices and apply for a check writer's job. He was so firmly established in my eyes as a lewd and tyrannical villain that it rather took me aback when he not only

promptly and cheerfully granted my request, but cordially wished me luck in my enterprise.

And, after all my qualms, the actual winning of the promotion proved absurdly simple. I told my story, wrote samples of my penmanship, and found myself on the waiting list. Two months later my turn came. I bade farewell to Florodora, and achieved the transition from Seventh Avenue to Fifth.

The job of check writing itself proved actually simpler than coupon counting; it was indeed so completely commonplace that scarcely an incident of the eight months or so I spent at it sticks in my memory today. But that extra two dollars a week was very welcome at home; and my own pleasant reward was in my mother's silent approval and the respect of my sisters, shown in all the little ways in which families know how to make such things understood.

The most important thing about the check-writing department for me was the chum I found there. She was a girl of almost exactly my own age, as black-haired as I was fair; her name was Celia, universally pronounced 'Ceely.' Within a week we were inseparable.

So far as I can recall, the term 'girl friend' was as yet unknown; at least in the specific and meaningful sense in which a youngster would employ it today. But the thing itself, for which the term now stands, was there then as it is now; as I fancy it has existed throughout all history, ever since Eve's daughters first realized that it was only to each other that they could safely give their uttermost trust.

For some two years Ceely and I were as near to one soul in two bodies as it is possible for human beings, compelled to sleep in different homes, to be. We not

only shared our lunches and our lunch-hour excursions, and every possible evening hour (alternating in exact schedule between her home and mine); but all our hopes and speculations upon the nature of life and mankind — employing the latter term both in its general and in its specific sense — our aspirations and fears.

Our first great mutual discovery was a common ambition. Having found that promotion could be won and that its rewards were both tangible and sweet, I was already aspiring further. Ceely imparted to me what she had already learned about the next step open to us.

This was the order department on the floor below. By dint of hanging around we presently won permission to practice, at lunch time and after hours, writing out orders on the huge old-fashioned Elliot-Fisher billing machines. After that it was once more only a question of waiting for the vacancies until we became full-fledged order clerks, at the princely wage of eight dollars a week. What was vastly more precious to both of us was the privilege granted us by our respective mothers of thenceforth carrying lunch money instead of carrying lunch.

That was a proud and happy morning on which we first rode down on the L without our telltale packages. But, having secured our twenty-five cents apiece per day, we promptly set our joint ingenuity to work on plans for better utilization of this wealth than in mere stomach-filling. In a remarkably short time, though not without some painful and disappointing experiments with pickles and other deceptively inexpensive viands, we had worked out a standard schedule.

Its basis was the daily co-operative purchase of a quart of milk, two boxes of gingersnaps, and a bag of

peaches — total cost thirty cents, or fifteen cents apiece. This left ten cents apiece for shopping. Neither of us ever wasted a thought on the meagerness or the monotony of our luncheon fare. Our minds were too fully occupied by more thrilling things than food. As for calories, we had never heard of them; and vitamins hadn't even been invented then.

What glittering vistas were opened before us by that simple expedient! Ten cents a day was enough to transform us, in our lunch-hour peregrinations through the big department stores, from merely wistful pilgrims into potential customers, entitled to respect and courteous attention.

Many of the finest stores in New York of that day were within a few minutes' walk of Fifth Avenue and Twenty-Third Street; but it was Siegel & Cooper's huge, gaudy, and glittering building at Eighteenth Street and Sixth Avenue, with its tall pinchbeck fountain in the center of the big ground-floor rotunda, that drew us oftenest and most irresistibly.

My own first purchase was only consummated after three days of self-denial, which enabled me to lay three dimes on the counter and proudly bear away a pair of clocked stockings of mercerized lisle, whose luster faintly suggested silk.

The choice, of course, was as much Ceely's as mine, and had been arrived at only after a long series of anxious inspections and comparisons, and mutual conferences. We finally decided upon a pair of brilliant royal blue.

Once I had them, I couldn't, of course, wait until I got home; we scurried straight from the store to the office, and then and there, in the girls' washroom, I put



them on. And that afternoon and evening it rained. Rain? It poured in teeming torrents.

That night the tragic results were revealed. I pulled off my wet new stockings; but their essential principle remained behind. My skinny legs were of a deep rich purple hue. They retained this color for fully ten days thereafter. It is still a mystery to me how a color that in the stockings yielded so easily to a bit of rain water proved, upon the human skin, so stubbornly resistant to the most desperate scouring.

Poor Ceely suffered, in sympathy, nearly as much as I. I can still hear her tragic stage whisper each morning as she joined me in the L train:

‘Have you got it off yet?’

## V

Fairly soon after we became order clerks, Ceely and I developed into the two fastest machine operators in the entire department; but nobody, not even we ourselves, ever found out which of us was better. We didn’t want to know. We were content to outdistance all the others; but if either of us ever found herself, by luck or by that little extra touch of deftness one’s fingers have some days, getting ahead of the other — she unobtrusively slowed down. Day after day and week after week we finished in an exact tie in the number of orders written; nor could anyone, even the department manager, tease or browbeat or tempt us into a real trial of speed and skill.

But, for all that, the more completely Ceely and I put our comradeship above all else, the harder we tried

to merge our very personalities, the more completely we confided in each other, the more plainly the inevitable end of our comradeship came in sight. For with every exchange of confidences the profound difference in our two characters revealed itself more clearly.

My own ambitions had been no more than whetted by my rise from coupon counter to order clerk. Once Ceely and I were safely established as the leaders in our department, I began not only looking but actively fretting for further and more spectacular worlds to conquer. And I still remember with what a painful shock I finally realized that Ceely actually didn't want to come along.

The heights were not for Ceely, and she knew it. She was contented with her fairly comfortable little home, her fairly decent working conditions, and her fairly decent wage. Beyond that the most to which she looked forward in life — and a few years later, indeed, attained — was a small portion of romance; and after that marriage and a home of her own; a little one. So good-bye to Ceely.

But with each day in which we exchanged daydreams I was growing more impatient and more greedy. Order writing had become hopelessly humdrum; and no business career of which I could learn seemed to offer a girl much better; particularly a girl who had gone no farther than grammar school.

I could, of course, by now have taken a night-school course in shorthand, bookkeeping, and typing, and have become a secretary, like my calm and efficient elder sister; but nothing of what I saw or heard of such a career appealed to me. I knew far more clearly and emphatically what I didn't want than what I did.

Once more I began hunting for my way out; and once again I found it. Almost next door to us in 115th Street lived a girl whom we had known slightly for several years. By one chance or another, about this time we began to see a little more of her. She was as much one of our little village community as ourselves; but in this closer acquaintance I learned that her job was quite unlike any I had ever before heard described in Harlem.

She was in charge of the news and theater-ticket stand in the Hotel Belmont. I eagerly begged for more particulars; and all that I heard seemed to spell romance. This girl, only a little older than I, and with no more natural advantages, spent her days in the midst of glitter and movement. She was trusted with important responsibilities; knew by name and sight men and women whose names were in the newspaper headlines. She even served some of them as customers. And I was cooped up all day long in a bare office, pounding out interminable orders for tobacco on a clumsy old billing machine.

Again it took me a long time to pluck up courage to ask for what I wanted; and again the moment I did so all seemed ridiculously easy. I had thought myself still too much a 'kid,' and stood in awe of our dashing young friend's worldly wisdom. But when at last I blurted out my longings — presto! she was not only all kindness, but all enthusiasm.

'Why, of course,' she said instantly. 'You've got the right idea; you'll be a star as a news-stand girl. I'll take you down to Mr. Bascom myself; he'll hire you the minute he sees you.'

Mr. Bascom (the elder, in case anyone who reads this remembers either of them) was then manager of the

Tyson Company, which in those days controlled practically every news and theater-ticket stand in New York City.

A few days later we did go down to see him; and all the way my warm-hearted sponsor filled my ears with a steady flow of coaching on the intricacies of news-stand management. Much of this later stood me in excellent stead; but all of it put together fell far short (as indeed any verbal description must have done) of conveying the full rowdy flavor of the job.

For Mr. Bascom did hire me — not quite the minute he saw me, but a surprisingly few minutes afterward. And, innocent that I was, I was raised to the seventh heaven when I learned that my salary was to be the princely sum of twelve dollars a week. I wondered why both Mr. Bascom and my champion appeared to consider that a mere inconsequential detail!

Very early one morning, almost exactly three years after the one on which I had first gone forth to confront the world, I found myself — a news-stand girl assigned for training — creeping like a small and badly frightened mouse into a place the remotest like of which I had never seen before — the carved and gilded corridors of the Hotel Waldorf-Astoria.

## 2

# THE WALDORF—AND AFTER

### I

MY FIRST view of the corridors of Heaven (assuming that the experience is some day to be mine) may possibly prove more overpowering than my first view of those of the Waldorf-Astoria. But as I look back across thirty-odd years to that prodigious morning, it hardly seems probable.

For in those days I had received considerable authoritative descriptions of Heaven's glories; but the splendors of the Waldorf took me completely unaware.

My total experience, you must remember, in my not-quite-seventeen years, comprised a childhood in the little town of Newburgh, up the Hudson; a girlhood in a 'railroad flat' in the Irish village that then centered around West 115th Street; a series of commonplace jobs in bare and barnlike offices reached by daily journeys on the Sixth Avenue L; and a social life whose pinnacles were trolley excursions and Sunday-evening promenades on Seventh Avenue. We had heard, even in Irish Harlem, of the Waldorf-Astoria; but it was no more



*Keystone View Co.*

WALDORF SOCIETY: MRS. STUYVESANT FISH

This picture must have been taken several years before Mary Doyle knew her



*Keystone View Co.*

PEACOCK ALLEY IN THE OLD HOTEL WALDORF-ASTORIA



than a name to which not even the vaguest mental picture could attach itself.

I pushed timidly through the revolving door to which I had been directed, on Thirty-Third Street — and stopped in my tracks. I was standing on a blood-red velvet carpet in a silent and coldly glittering chaos utterly beyond my mind's power to grasp: pink and lavender veined marble; snow-white statuary; gigantic palms whose supercilious fronds brushed the gilded cornices. I can still remember the shock with which I realized that those palms were 'real' — actual living plants.

At that early hour the corridors were deserted; nothing that I saw in that blaze of electric light through myriads of cut-glass prisms had even a remotely familiar look. How long I stood there I don't to this day know. But something had come in with me through that revolving door: the tough-fibered tradition of hard-working Irish Harlem. Never could I in my wildest imaginings have pictured such a place as this; but now that I was in it, somewhere a job was waiting for me.

I turned to my left, and there it was, only a few steps away — the news-stand at which I was to report. The two radiant beings in snowy shirtwaists, behind its counter, must be my new fellow-workers.

Between yawns and exchanges of languid persiflage they were just now, with great deliberation, putting their stock of books, newspapers, and magazines to rights, ever and anon cocking a head with a great show of studying the artistic effect. To walk straight up and speak to them was beyond me; but I managed to sidle up fairly close to the stand and there remain, poised awkwardly on one foot, tongue-tied and big-eyed, until



one of the girls, her curiosity aroused, asked what I wanted.

To my dismay and confusion, she professed not to know, or to have quite forgotten, that a new apprentice was to report that morning. Luckily the other girl remembered something of the sort, or said she did; and I was bidden to come behind the counter and put my hat and coat in the locker.

My training began with suspiciously business-like promptness, and was of the most severely practical character. To two young ladies who had probably danced at least three-fourths of the previous night away, I was little less than a godsend. Flush-faced and happy, I dashed to and fro; out in front and back to the closets; stacking books, draping magazines, dropping them and picking them up again; meekly demolishing what I had just done and beginning all over when one of my preceptresses, lolling against the rear shelves, decided that some other way looked better.

Half an hour or so later a gorgeous male creature in cutaway and striped trousers, patent-leather shoes, wing collar, puff cravat, and gardenia'd buttonhole strolled up and as it were absent-mindedly drifted in behind the counter. He gave me an inquiring glance. 'New kid,' said one of the girls. Not another word was said. The newcomer glanced here and there, peered into one of the closets — neither girl paying him the slightest attention — and strolled away again in what I was later to learn was the direction of the bar.

Not until several days later did I discover that this was the manager of the stand. His first appearance was entirely typical of his peculiar method of 'management.' He was only in evidence for a few minutes a day, at

opening and closing time, and he never attempted to exercise the slightest authority, even over me. As for my four youthful seniors, they were undisputed queens of the news-stand. Indeed, they were more than that. In their own estimation and that of many of the hotel employees and the more impressionable guests, they were queens of the Waldorf — and queens could do no wrong.

I have never in my life known anybody else bearing at least the nominal status of employee who did as completely as he pleased as those four girls did. They arrived, as a rule, fairly close to the time at which they were supposed to go on duty; but they contrived to do so with an air which said that it was merely out of courtesy to the girls whom they relieved, and perhaps partly because it was at the moment their pleasure to grace the hotel with their presence — never, certainly, from any sense of responsibility.

One of them carried this so far as to come to work in the morning, whenever she was on duty early, in her riding habit, fresh from a canter along the Park bridle-paths with a millionaire's son at her bridle-rein, and commandeer a hotel dressing-room in which to change to her business costume. Not one of the four but possessed several beautiful and costly diamond ornaments, which she carefully deposited in the hotel safe before going on duty.

Their conversation behind the stand was all of dinners and theater box parties, automobiles and wine vintages and taste in jewelry. Naturally they lorded it over me without mercy. How I used to envy, and dream of emulating, the nonchalance with which they exchanged persiflage with the famous — or at least notorious —

the wealthy and the powerful! And yet I gradually became aware of a point beyond which even a Waldorf girl's impudence did not carry her.

They might — and did — exchange broad chaff with John W. Gates, match quip for quip with Theodore P. Shonts and Foxhall Keene, and even fling sallies at August Belmont or Senator Platt, with no worse response than absent-minded silence. 'Diamond Jim' Brady was of course fair game; Lillian Russell herself seemed almost grateful to be treated as 'just one of us girls'; if Harry Thaw was waited on in stony aloofness, it was not from any motive of respect.

At the end of my first week, indeed, it would not have surprised me to hear them proffer friendly pleasantries to Bishop Potter or Cardinal Farley himself, when one of those dignitaries passed on his way to some imposing church or charity banquet in the great state ballroom overhead. And if the Cardinal had turned his gentle face in their direction for so much as an encouraging glance, I am quite sure they would have been ready to meet His Eminence at least half-way.

But let Mrs. Ava Willing Astor, Mrs. Stuyvesant Fish, Mrs. Hermann Oelrichs, Mrs. George Gould, or a very few others stroll up to the stand and casually inspect the pile of current novels — instantly butter would not have melted in any of those four mouths.

## II

I can see even now exactly how Mrs. Stuyvesant Fish appeared at the stand, inquiring in her high nasal tones about some current theatrical attraction — perhaps

*When Knighthood Was in Flower*, or James K. Hackett in *The Prisoner of Zenda*.

That good lady possessed no visible eyebrows, which gave her, beneath her lofty pompadour and 'complexion veil,' a comical air of perpetual astonishment. And her social position required her to wear a royal purple velvet gown with sweeping train, beneath which was rustling evidence of many taffeta petticoats. Above this she wore a collarette of sables and an enormous velvet hat from which dangled three sweeping willow plumes of ostrich feathers, also dyed purple. Her pink veil was adorned with purple dots, and even my inexperience found them startling.

Everybody, men and women alike, wore lavender gloves in those days, and so did Mrs. Fish; and in her somewhat ample bosom was something resembling a small haystack of orchids and lilies of the valley.

But of all my memories, the most nearly perfect picture of the pattern of the time, I think, was my first encounter with Mrs. Hermann Oelrichs.

It was at the great hour of teatime one afternoon early in my service. I was taking a telephone order for theater tickets, when I became aware of an extraordinary couple — or, to be more precise, of a Presence and an escort — bearing down upon me.

A little in advance, as she changed her course slightly (one speaks of her naturally in nautical metaphor, as one would of a transatlantic liner) to approach my post, came as formidable-appearing a woman as the world could show.

She was of not much more than average height, but her tremendous shoulders and chest, her big red face behind the pink, black-dotted veil, the sweeping lines

of her black velvet coat, her wide and lofty black velvet, black-plumed hat, and most of all her hard, bright, black eyes, made her impact upon the vision about equal to that of a charge of the Death's Head Hussars.

Curiously, she was all the more impressive from the fact that she was wedge-shaped, tapering in almost straight lines downward from her mighty shoulders, very much as did the late Mr. Robert Fitzsimmons.

This portentous apparition came to rest before my book counter, glanced over the array of Richard Harding Davis, *Graustark*, *The Crisis*, and so on, and without a word spoken picked up three or four; swung around somewhat as I had seen the new battleship *Connecticut* do on leaving Brooklyn Navy Yard, and began to pick up speed.

At this point I recovered sufficiently from my awe to remember my duty to my employers.

'I beg your pardon, ma'am,' I stammered, 'but to whom shall I charge those?'

Instantly the departing dowager whirled about, and like the Ancient Mariner fixed me with a glittering eye. On her big features was an indescribable mixture of anger and amazement.

'Ho-o-o-ow dayehr-r-r-r you!' said she in a deep, harsh voice; and said not one word more, but turned and resumed her progress. And then came what still seems to me the queerest part of the whole curious and illuminating episode.

Her escort unobtrusively fell away from her side and minced over to the stand. He was tall and blond, with a pink and much-barbered face; he wore striped trousers and a braided cutaway coat, patent-leather shoes and fawn-color spats; there was a gardenia in his buttonhole

and a huge black pearl in his fawn-color Ascot cravat. In one soft white hand he carried gingerly a pair of lavender gloves and a highly polished cane.

Upon his head this escort of the self-appointed queen of New York society wore, as he strolled through the Waldorf parlors by her side, his pearl-gray top hat; nor did he doff nor even so much as touch it so long as he remained within my range of vision.

Just now he in his turn, and in his own peculiar way, was also intent upon impressing his social importance upon the little news-stand girl. He leaned his little soft paunch upon the rim of the counter, his soft pink face radiating amiable condescension.

‘Never mind, my child,’ he half whispered in a high, effeminate lisp. ‘That’s Tessie Oelrichs. Just charge ‘em to her; charge anything you want to, to her; she’ll never know the difference, hee-hee-hee!’ And he toddled after his patroness.

‘That?’ said one of the older girls contemptuously in reply to my inquiry, not even troubling herself to glance after him. ‘Oh, that was Harry Lehr. He’s a wine agent.’

### III

But ‘society’ in all its acute self-consciousness and naïvely sensitive self-importance was after all but one tiny facet of the immensely varied and tumultuous life that poured all day long through the Waldorf corridors. And to show you just how complete and amazing its contrasts could be, let me set against the tale of ‘Tessie’ Oelrichs the story of my friend Mrs. John W. Gates.

At this time the flamboyant John W. ('Bet-you-a million!') was riding the very crest of his power and success. He was living, so far as a man of his appalling and restless energy could be said to live in any one place, in an enormous suite on one of the Waldorf's upper floors; and as he did everywhere, was enjoying himself tremendously in its congenial atmosphere. But as much could hardly be said of his motherly and frankly bewildered wife.

She was always a little lonely, a little frightened and ill at ease. Far superior to the other wives of 'Pittsburgh millionaires' who cut such pathetic and ludicrous figures in those gilded corridors; more kindly and less pretentious; she presently, in the most perfectly natural manner, struck up a friendship with an almost equally lonely and bewildered little news-stand girl.

She gradually acquired the habit, whenever she passed the counter during my tour of duty, of stopping for little vaguely amiable chats. It never even occurred to me that in all that vast hotel there was no one else with whom the good soul felt free to gossip.

Presently she took to bringing some little gift with her — a box of handkerchiefs, a bottle of perfume, various small articles of jewelry; all of which I, still green in the art of tip-accepting, received with blushes and much awkwardness. My superior and sophisticated colleagues found it all vastly amusing, but I suppose my very unhandiness gave Mrs. Gates a fellow-feeling for me.

Then one afternoon she bustled up to me with a radiant face.

'My dear,' she cried while still several feet distant, 'who do you think is coming East to visit us?'



MRS. JOHN W. ('BET-YOU-A-MILLION!') GATES

*Acme*





'Your son?' I asked; for already I had heard a great deal from his mother about 'Charley.'

'Yes, indeed,' said she; 'my boy will be here in a few days.' And she rippled on happily, as mothers will; and then came the invitation that took my breath away, and still does when I think of it.

'Now, my dear, the very first afternoon that you are off duty while Charley is here, you must come up to our apartment and have tea with us. I do so want him to meet you.'

What is more, there was nothing to do but accept; she would have been both puzzled and deeply hurt by a refusal. She was the kind of person about whom you felt that at once. She saw nothing incongruous in a meeting, on terms of social equality, between her son and the little news-stand girl who was getting twelve dollars a week (and tips).

And so, perhaps, there wasn't; but I wonder if there is anyone left in America today who would feel that way about it.

A vastly more pathetic example of the cruelty of wealth when imposed upon those whose simplicity and kindness unfits them for it, was Benjamin N. Duke. Fate — in his case in the guise of an able and ruthless brother — had pitchforked him too into the Waldorf. The millions that stood in his name were an almost unbearable burden to him; he had not the faintest idea what to do with them or about them.

His wife and daughter were in England in quest of a presentation at court; his hours were spent in the futile wanderings of a lost soul through the Waldorf's public rooms. And presently, from sheer loneliness and boredom, he was begging permission to call upon the news-

stand girl. It took him nearly as long to win permission as it did his family to gain admittance to the Court of St. James's!

We had had remarkably little experience with multi-millionaires in my normal social sphere; but that had not prevented us from forming an extremely poor opinion of their probable motives. However, the utter innocence and complete harmlessness of poor old Mr. Duke gradually became so apparent that finally, in sheer pity, I consented to go automobiling with him (with another girl along as a final lingering precaution).

Save for the other girl, it was the ideal setting for melodrama — the young, innocent (but scarcely unsuspecting; indeed, all too suspecting) working girl; the 'high-powered motor car'; and the crafty and insidious multi-millionaire. About as crafty and insidious as Mr. Webster's Caspar Milquetoast.

As we bowled swiftly and smoothly up Fifth Avenue (they didn't even have traffic lights, then), the only reminders of our host's presence, perched timidly between us on the very edge of the back seat, were occasional feeble little throat-clearing noises, rather like the chirp of an unusually bashful robin. But as we turned into Central Park he gathered all his courage, and addressed me directly.

'Do you know any of the good old hymn-tunes?' he asked.

For a moment the remark was utterly beyond my comprehension. My plain bewilderment must have given him a spark more courage; he went on to reveal the innermost secret of his poor, old, lonely heart. The one remaining genuine and unfailing pleasure of his hopeless existence was in singing, and dwelling in loving

memory upon, the Methodist hymns of his Carolina boyhood.

His worn face lighted up as he talked; he began to hum, to beat time with a forefinger; then he burst into full song.

So far, no great harm done. At its utmost compass Mr. Duke's voice could scarcely have been audible to the passers-by. But my own unruly sense of fun, as too often happened in those days, rose up and overpowered me. I had Methodist relatives, too; I knew that old revival hymn as well as he did. All at once the magnificent absurdity of the whole affair — my mother's warnings against the wicked wiles of wealth; my own qualms; and now — this — burst on me, complete and beautiful; and I too opened my lips in song.

My young contralto more than made up in volume for what it lacked in training. I speedily observed that all folk in other cars and the still more numerous horse-drawn turnouts, and all pedestrians on the sidewalks, were turning to look after us in a wild surmise. I felt my girl friend grow rigid with scorn and horror. Mr. Duke alone, rapt far away from the petty, weary round of a plutocrat's life, borne aloft on the wings of melody, continued happily to beat time.

The trouble was that now all my defenses were down; with innocent and childlike directness, the very next Sunday afternoon Mr. Duke came up to call.

Enter the multi-millionaire, all too obviously grateful for the privilege extended him, nervously eager to please; laden with flowers and candy for my mother, of whom he was plainly in terror — as to her own view he should have been. Introductions accomplished, long moments stretched out into painful silence until Mr. Duke,

inspired by the piano, desperately inquired if we'd like to join him in singing a few hymns!

The humor of the situation in turn prevailed upon my sister, the pianist of the family. And during the balance of that Sunday afternoon — as well as on every subsequent Sunday afternoon on which he could by any means gain admittance — Mr. Duke tasted what for him was earth's greatest happiness, in sitting with us around the piano and singing lustily the hymns of his Southern boyhood.

But millionaires, viewed merely as millionaires, soon lost all glamor for a Waldorf news-stand girl. They were underfoot all the time; and a singularly uninteresting lot they proved. Whole-hearted devotion to the accumulation of wealth had left them with neither friends nor mental resources outside their business hours. Not one of the group most in evidence at the Waldorf possessed sufficient imagination to collect postage stamps, let alone to develop a genuine cultural interest of any kind. All that was left to them after the day's work was done was to wander helplessly and aimlessly about the hotel corridors, and presently to drift up to the news-stand because there was somebody there to talk to — and to bid for her attention and friendliness with small bribes of candy and flowers and trinkets, or even outright money tips.

The scientific capitalization of this and all other opportunities of the position formed one of the most important parts of my training as a Waldorf girl — and one of the most painful of my lessons. Very few things hurt worse than a kick on the ankle bone.

I had, after all, been brought up in the sturdy precepts of a grandfather who, a penniless immigrant from

County Cork, had fought his own way up to financial independence and a respected position in his new community, asking favors of no man. Consequently, when perhaps the second man I waited on handed me a twenty-dollar bill for a ten-dollar purchase, casually remarking, 'Keep the change,' I blushed and stammered, and was attempting to refuse — when agony shot through me. My mouth flew shut, and my hand, still clutching the ten-dollar bill, despite myself, shot back and down to rub my outraged ankle. The customer strolled away.

I looked up into the cold and angry eyes of the older girl who had kicked me.

'Say, are you trying to gum the works?' she demanded. 'Want to spoil the graft? If you're too high and mighty to keep that ten-spot, give it to me! I can use it!'

As she was, at that moment, the last person on earth to whom I would have felt like doing that or any other favor, it naturally followed that I kept the ten dollars myself. And, having kept my first tip, it was easier to keep my second; and easier still, my third. Within a week I was as prompt and deft at gathering in cash tips as any of the older girls, and I am afraid as cold-bloodedly accurate in measuring out my acknowledgements — an impassively murmured 'Thank you,' for mere silver or even a small bill; a nod and faint smile for five dollars; and beaming gratitude only for ten dollars or more.

#### IV

It was a strange life in its grotesque mixture of tragedy and farce; in its unending jumble of uproar and movement, its stridency and simplicity; and yet, unhealthy

as it was in many ways, it had the one great virtue of being unfailingly interesting.

Even the early morning hours, with the gray light revealing bare corridors, the rugs rolled back and the swift, amazingly smooth and orderly cleaning routine under way, were as thrilling as any. Though at that moment I must myself be working at top speed to dress the stand and lay out the morning papers, I never tired of the spectacle of the great hotel arousing itself for the day.

One of the curious features of the morning rush hours was the fact that it was the older, and as I soon learned, the wealthier men who were first on the scene; who could not endure a single second's delay in their flight toward their desks. It was not until the morning wore along toward nine that the smart young men would come sauntering down. These later comers must needs, before selecting their papers, favor the girl behind the counter with a lordly and critical inspection which took in every visible detail of her appearance.

If the result of this survey was favorable, it was customary to brighten her whole day for her with an approving comment.

By ten the morning rush was over, and we had breakfast—sent out from the dining-room, and usually ordered and paid for by one of our most reliable 'free spenders,' who has since, I grieve to say, for reasons not unconnected with his free spending, exchanged the hospitality of the Waldorf for that of the State of New York.

My own breakfast invariably consisted of cantaloupe stuffed with French vanilla ice cream; two cups of hot chocolate with lots of whipped cream on top; and sweet

rolls. (This within a few months of the days when Ceely and I had eaten gingersnaps and milk on a desk-top to save ten cents for shopping!) And after breakfast we frequently stole naps in the recess under the counter, with a folded coat for a pillow. No news-stand girl would waste off-duty hours in sleep.

Not until noon did any of the women guests appear. In the morning, save for ourselves, the lower floors of the Waldorf remained practically an Eveless Eden. Such women guests as were even awake were having breakfast, massage, beauty treatments, and the like in their own rooms.

When, around noon or a little later, they began to appear, it was comical to observe the unanimity with which they waddled down voicing complaints. The apartment had been too cold; it had been too hot; the street noises had been terrible; the cleaners had raised such a disturbance in the corridor that sleep had been impossible; there had been a disgracefully noisy party next door or overhead.

If there exists on earth a more utterly useless form of life than a dowager hotel-dweller, I have no wish to make its acquaintance.

The early afternoon was our quietest time, and consequently that during which we were supposed to put our sales records in order. But as we vastly preferred reading our own stock of novels and magazines, and nibbling the candy of which there was always a floating supply, the busy hour that set in again at four o'clock teatime invariably caught us unprepared.

Theoretically all sales were to be entered the moment they were made; but it was part of the insouciant pose of a Waldorf girl to carry all your sales in your head and



only enter them from memory at the end of your tour of duty.

Many a time that secret imparted by Harry Lehr, that Tessie Oelrichs never knew nor cared what was charged to her, was a godsend to a girl striving desperately to straighten out her charts and persuade her books to balance. It would not surprise me in the least, if the records are still in existence, to be told that they reveal that frequently the good lady's love for the drama took her to five different theaters in the same evening.

How the manager — if he even tried to do so — ever made head or tail of the stand accounts as a whole was, and still is, a mystery to me. Perhaps he also had his own methods of spreading a surface serenity over a chaos of discrepancies; perhaps neither he nor his superiors cared any more than we did so long as profits as a whole were satisfactory, as they certainly must have been. Neither life nor death was taken seriously in the atmosphere of the Waldorf; why then should bookkeeping be?

Every evening after the rush died away there would be half an hour of anguish and much scribbling; frantic mutual queries, erasing and recasting of figures. Eventually, in some inexplicable manner, the books would emerge made up for the day in a fashion at least plausible to the eye; and peace would descend upon the 'social hall.' But not for long.

It would scarcely be disturbed by the occasional strayed reveler from the bar, or explorer bound thither from some ponderous function upstairs in search of liquid insurance against boredom. But it was inevitably shattered by the nightly procession of aged, bored, and lonely millionaires.

To see a man whose word could set thousands of his

fellow-men in motion or condemn them to idleness and misery sidle deprecatingly up to the counter, making timid, artless, and ineffectual noises to win the attention of the young woman behind it who was wishing with all her heart she dared to snub him — this may seem comic in the telling. But repeated night after night, it became pathetic and wearisome beyond belief. Not even the feeble jealousies among these department-store magnates and steel and railroad kings, in their halting rivalry for a moment's attention from a girl of seventeen, could put more than a wavering spark of life into their behavior. And over and over again they told the same rambling stories — tales of their business shrewdness; tales of their first triumphs; and by far the saddest of all, tales of their boyhood days.

Then unexpectedly, one day, I learned that my apprenticeship was ended; and, in my employer's eyes, successfully.

By what observations Mr. Bascom had convinced himself that I had become capable, not only of holding my own in that tumultuous atmosphere, but of assuming much more serious responsibilities, is just one more of those mysteries that still surround that part of my life, for me. I only know that I was summoned one day without the slightest warning, and was informed that a prize on which, I knew, many of the older girls had been longingly speculating, was to be mine.

The new Hotel Plaza was shortly to open its doors, and I was to be transferred thither; and, what was more, I was to be in full charge of the stand.

## V

On a proud day I strolled nonchalantly in at the door of the still unfinished Hotel Plaza; commandeered, in my best Waldorf-girl manner, a porter; and set about putting my new domain to rights. The final touches were still being given to the decorations. The lobby floor had not yet been laid, and we had to pick our way about precariously on plank runways.

Cooped up as we were in that big, still bare and raw-edged structure, with only ourselves for company, the newly assembled Plaza staff was not unlike a band of colonists new-landed on a promising but still unproved coast. The comparison may seem ridiculously far-fetched; but adventure, after all, is a matter of being made to feel adventurous. As matters stood in New York in that far-off time, the location of a great new hotel many blocks farther north on Fifth Avenue than anyone had gone before — more than a mile above the still-unchallenged Waldorf — was a venture of no little daring. And Fred Sterry, the Plaza's proprietor, a born hotel man with a genius for leadership, made every one of us, down to the humblest, feel that we had an active share in it.

With that fellow-feeling of shared discomfort and adventure to build on, he was able to create, in the Plaza's staff, an *esprit de corps* finer, stronger, and more genuine than (with one exception which shall be told of in its place) I have known anywhere in my life.

It was not only something so new to me that I could not even have named or described it, but the contrast to the blasé and cynical indifference of the Waldorf made its effect on me all the more powerful. All that I knew

was that almost overnight I found in myself an immense pride in and loyalty to the Plaza as an institution, and a conviction that it was not only the world's finest hotel, but was soon to be the most successful.

At the same time, I was still young and graceless and greedy enough to exploit to the utmost my privileges as a member of the Plaza family. A surprisingly small amount of sheer, cheerful impudence won for me virtually the run of the hotel. The institution known as the 'hostess' had not yet appeared to enrich American life, but by self-election I acquired a position in the Plaza somewhere between that of unofficial hostess and daughter of the regiment.

It was by grace of this assumption that, when the hotel at last was ready to begin functioning, a gentleman who came in at the new main entrance and approached the desk found no one to receive him except a young woman with an enormous yellow pompadour and a pronounced snub nose, seated upon the desk-top drumming a casual tattoo upon its marble face with a pair of French heels.

The newcomer's evident amusement was a trifle disconcerting, and I suddenly realized that the news-stand, where I was supposed to be on duty, wasn't even in sight from where I sat. But, not knowing what else to do, I remained where I was. I did stop kicking my feet.

There was a slightly strained moment of silence, broken by the gentleman, who inquired, with a barely perceptible trace of sarcasm, if I was the manager. Though by now uncomfortably aware of hot cheeks, I retained enough true Tyson-girl impudence to retort:

'Yes — manager of the news-stand.'

'Oh,' said the stranger. There was another brief pause. 'Do you mind if I register?'

Still sitting on the desk, I reached out casually, swung the brand-new register pad around in front of him, and dipped and handed him a pen. It suddenly occurred to me that this was the very first guest to register at the Plaza; my eager interest and curiosity were too much for my manners. I craned brazenly over his shoulder as he wrote, with a flamboyant flourish, on the first line, at the top of the page:

'Alfred Gwynne Vanderbilt.'

At that moment, luckily, the clerk who should have been on duty all this while returned, and with some incoherent attempt at an explanation of the situation, I fled.

Long afterward I learned from Mr. Sterry that Alfred G. Vanderbilt, when he engaged the entire third floor of the Plaza as bachelor quarters for himself, had stipulated among the conditions that he was to be the first guest to be permitted to register. He never once, thereafter, alluded to my own impromptu part in this ceremony upon which he had set such store. But for a long time his quizzical smile whenever he passed my stand could send the color to my face.

That hoydenish opening of the Plaza's career, however, was quaintly at odds both with the aims of its management and with the success which those aims from the very first achieved. There is a sense in which the opening of the Plaza was the first intimation that an age was passing — the age of the Waldorf and of all that it typified. The various tribes who had joined in the erection of that Tower of Babel were beginning to draw apart from each other.

The Waldorf itself did not yet even suspect what was happening. But Fred Sterry (and, I suppose, the men who backed him) had realized it, and had grasped the opportunity it offered.

He proposed to draw off from the older hotel the greater part of its most substantially wealthy, aristocratic, and therefore most permanently profitable clientèle, and attach it to the Plaza. To do this the Plaza, he had determined, must from the first strike a much more exclusive and correct, a more expensively restrained note than the gaudy old place it was to supersede.

It is curious how consistently the contrast between the two hotels was expressed in their every detail. The Waldorf in exterior design was a magnificent hodgepodge of balconies, gables, domed towers (scarcely two alike), and mansard roofs, completely faced with the reddest of red brick and tile. The Plaza still shows its cool gray and green-roofed emulation of a French Renaissance château across the sweep of Central Park. The Waldorf's colored marble, its gilding and red velvet, palms, and marble statues, had seemed to all America the last word in luxurious magnificence. But even the older generation felt dimly the superiority of the Plaza's cool green and white marble, its greater spaciousness, with no more than judicious touches of crystal and silver to relieve its corridors from severity.

Passing directly from the milieu of the once far-famed 'Gold Room' and 'Turkish Room,' and their glittering chandeliers and noisy, jostling throngs, to the cool and quiet foyer of the Plaza, with its simpler and far more efficient lighting scheme, I witnessed, it seems to me, at close range an important step in America's coming of age.

Fortunately, after that first misadventure I soon

grasped the implications of my new position and began assiduously to take on the color of my environment. Within three weeks at most I should have been capable of greeting any of my former seniors at the Waldorf with an aloof and slightly amused condescension that would have overpaid them for their casual lordliness toward me in my apprenticeship days. Indeed, once the Plaza began to fill with its smaller but far more choice clientèle, and the tips began to flow in across the news-stand counter with a quiet lavishness very different from the Waldorf's exuberance, but in equally satisfying volume, I began to enjoy my butterfly stage to the full.

It was no mere coincidence that at about this time I won final success in a protracted campaign to persuade my family to desert 115th Street in favor of what, in my fast-growing snobbery, I considered a 'better neighborhood.' It was at least more convenient to my work, being on Central Park West, though only a few blocks below its upper end.

With the new apartment came new clothes and finery, and a whole array of newly learned self-indulgences. The Plaza kept my extravagances within better bounds, young chameleon that I was, than the Waldorf would have done. But the simplicities of Irish Harlem were left pretty far behind. I still remember a bird bought as a hat ornament which cost \$17.50. The first time I wore it I was caught in the rain; it was ruined, tossed aside, and never worn again.

## VI

In my own mind I was very much part of the world of the Plaza, and a far from unimportant part. With my

newly acquired social perspective and my vast though still slightly unripe store of sophistication and worldly wisdom, I made the anxieties of the management regarding the social status of our guests my personal burden.

It was becoming plainer every day that the Plaza had 'caught on.' The shrewd calculation that had gone into every detail of its planning, design, and construction had justified itself. The hotel was rapidly acquiring that mysterious but immensely valuable characteristic for which I do not know any exact English name, and so must call *cachet*. And that is a thing not only extraordinarily difficult to capture, but even harder to keep.

Its possession by an institution open to the general public is only too apt to attract precisely those hordes whose arrival destroys the very thing that brought them thither. And yet a hotel is a commercial enterprise; it is no easy thing for it to turn away patronage that pays — and pays, as a rule, with extreme liberality. Moreover, the problem was a new one in the United States of America. Our management had little or no precedent to guide it in its efforts to cultivate that precise degree of snobbery which should prove most profitable.

That their plotting of their course, though in the event it proved amazingly accurate and successful, was attended by no small amount of personal worry and distress, I can testify from personal observation. Their difficulties were acute from the very beginning, because not only had they acquired their news-stand girl and a considerable portion of the hotel staff by direct recruiting from the Waldorf; a very large share of the early guest list was drawn from that same luxuriant soil. And that soil in the social sense sprouted both flowers and weeds with the same light-hearted and impartial prodigality.



As much effort as could tactfully be made was exerted to cull only the choice blossoms, and discourage the migration of the weeds — at least of the more brilliantly varicolored ones. On the whole it was successful. I was soon serving Mrs. Stuyvesant Fish and 'Tessie' Oelrichs as regularly and frequently at the Plaza as we ever had at the Waldorf. Mr. and Mrs. George Gould moved uptown, bag and baggage, immediately after the opening; and most of the other more desirable among the lesser lights, of course, followed in the wake of these leaders.

But the full flavor of a crisis came with the descent upon us, quite early in our career, of a large section of what in the Waldorf we had learned to call the 'horsy set.' It was an open secret among the hotel staff that Mr. Sterry had observed their arrival with a marked absence of enthusiasm; he did not quite venture to decline their patronage, but he would vastly have preferred their room to their company. As it turned out, however, the fears excited by this particular invasion proved comically groundless. The event speedily demonstrated that chameleon characteristics are by no means the exclusive prerogative of youthful news-stand girls. After a few weeks in the Plaza's more rarefied social atmosphere some of the very folk whom I had remembered as among the noisiest and most carefree of the Waldorf's patrons had become models of restrained propriety.

Still there were, perhaps not exactly scenes, but what might more mildly be characterized as episodes. The most distressing of these, not only in its actual occurrence but in a painful after-rash of gossip and newspaper comment, burst upon us one afternoon in the Palm Room at teatime, with scarcely as much warning, and



*Keystone View Co.*

MR. AND MRS. HARRY LEHR



with something the same general effect, as a high-explosive shell.

Mrs. Patrick Campbell even before her arrival had definitely been one of those guests regarding whom we had been rather on hot coals. It might not please her even now to know how narrow was the margin by which, when first she swept majestically up to the Plaza's desk, she escaped being regretfully informed that no rooms were at the moment available.

Naturally she had no inkling of this fact. But under the circumstances it was hardly a happy thought on her part, a few days later, to appear in all her statuesque beauty in the Palm Room at the height of the tea hour, and, having inevitably drawn all eyes to her, calmly produce and light a cigarette.

This, you must carefully remember, was in 1908 or thereabouts. No doubt many daring feminine spirits, at least in New York, were already trying, in the privacy of their homes, the taste of the sinful substance. But a cigarette publicly displayed in a lady's mouth marked her definitely as a fallen woman. Such conduct in our Palm Room was a horror unthinkable; that it should be Mrs. Pat Campbell who should thus repay our charity in admitting her within our chaste portals made it ten times worse. Had General Sherman dismounted from his horse, climbed down from his pedestal, and come strolling in through our foyer with Miss Victory on his arm, the sensation would have been no greater, and the distress of the management far less.

I don't remember which intrepid soul it was who, after a series of whispered conferences in which dismay mounted rapidly toward panic, finally volunteered to approach the lady and request that she extinguish the

abomination. I am quite sure that his knees knocked together and that his first effort to convey his message through chattering teeth proved unintelligible.

He presently succeeded, almost in spite of himself, in making his meaning all too clear. And thereupon Mrs. Campbell shot upward to her full imperial height, dashed to the floor the cause of all the commotion, and stalked regally from the room. Within an hour she had demanded her reckoning and, with a jealous regard for all possible dramatic values in the performance, proceeded to shake the dust of the Plaza from her feet.

She left behind a hotel staff crushed, profusely perspiring, but on the whole relieved. In their innocence they had not yet grasped the full implications of the *affaire Campbell*. On the following morning they were cruelly disabused.

Among those to whom Mrs. Campbell poured forth her outraged indignation — in fact, I suspect, the very first person in whom she confided — was a gentleman named Axel Toxen Worm.

Toxen Worm may still be remembered here and there by a few lean and slippered pantaloons, though later geniuses have perhaps unfairly overblown his fame. He was widely known in his time as Tanbark Worm — a tribute to one of his most brilliant flights of fancy, involving this same Mrs. Patrick Campbell. (I should perhaps explain that this Worm, whom many besides the staff of the Hotel Plaza considered all too fitly named, was employed in the capacity of press agent by David Belasco, under whose management Mrs. Campbell had come to America.) This simple stroke of genius consisted in carpeting the street before the theater in which Mrs. Campbell was playing with tanbark. Inquiring reporters

were able to learn without too great difficulty that her exquisitely sensitive nerves demanded protection during her performances — that is, her *stage* performances — from the noises of street traffic. (This was a New York in which the principal street noise was still the ring of horses' hoofs on asphalt.)

Given a gentleman of such alert and enterprising gifts as the sympathetic confidant of her grievances, the ultimate result of Mrs. Campbell's feud with the Plaza may readily be imagined. Likewise the effect upon our jealously guarded social dignity. It was both painful and prolonged. But it was doubtless due solely to feelings exacerbated by newspaper headlines, of which it seemed as though we never would see the last, that certain dark and cynical mutterings were heard from time to time among us. Some embittered souls actually affected to question the spontaneity of Mrs. Campbell's sudden craving for tobacco that fatal afternoon in our Palm Room. It is, of course, quite unthinkable that it should have had its origin in the fertile brain of Axel Toxen Worm.

Perhaps the painful aftermath of that quaint affair was indirectly serviceable to Elinor Glyn when, a few weeks later, she arrived for the first time in America and headed straight for the Plaza. From the moment of her appearance it was quite evident that she had brought with her an intention, amounting to grim determination, to live up — or down — to her advance reputation as authoress of *Three Weeks* (that 'wickedest book of the century' which would today be considered practically a Sunday-school tract).

But her violently carrot-colored hair and purple-shadowed eyes, her fluttering many-hued chiffons, and

even her carefully calculated languishings and undulations, were endured by the Plaza without a murmur. The acute discomfort they caused found vent behind the scenes; but in public they encountered a meek and exemplary courtesy which, I cannot help suspecting, owed much to the chastening effects of our encounter with Mrs. Campbell.

Indeed, I am quite sure that it was not Mrs. Campbell's theatrical background — or even her theatricality — which had raised the first doubts regarding her; but her marital misadventures. We had in fact already begun to favor a slight admixture of the theater (though only, of course, of its very cream) in our resident guest list. The feeling seemed to be that it gave the hotel more color and perhaps slightly offset a certain tendency toward stodginess which was beginning to show itself as a result of too much unrelieved wealth and 'social position.'

Still, the true Plaza attitude toward these stage folk was accurately phrased by our cloakroom concessionaire one early morning. I had just had my first glimpse of Fritzi Scheff, all sparkle and gayety and fire, darting through the foyer from her morning ride in the park, pursued by a laughing, chattering group, and had asked him who it was.

'It's Fritzi Scheff,' he replied primly. 'You know — the young woman who is starring in *Mademoiselle Modiste*. But then, she's married to Mr. Fox, and he's an author; and besides, they say he comes of a very good family in the South.'

## VII

Perhaps our management's standards both of society and of propriety began to mellow a trifle, once our position became a little more secure. At any rate, not only did we accept Broadway's reigning musical-comedy star, but some of the definitely spectacular figures of the back-stage, lobster-and-champagne-supper circles of that day began to be seen with increasing frequency in our dining-rooms and public halls.

With rare exceptions they were not at all the same figures who had made up the old 'fast set' of my Waldorf days. In that sphere men — and women — appear and vanish with rather horrifying rapidity.

The best way that occurs to me to illustrate the changing fashions in 'men about town,' as well as in other forms of ostentation, is to tell of my own experiences with one of these serpents whom the management had gradually permitted to creep unscotched into our Eden.

Just who first warned me against Jerome Sigel, I can't remember. People were always warning me against each other in those days. But I do remember that this particular warning was repeated many times by many people, and with a shuddering emphasis that struck me at the time by its incongruity with the total absence of anything in the least alarming in Jerry Sigel's appearance.

Villains then, as now, by rights should be tall, lean, and darkly handsome, and possessed of a sinister fascination. But this one was short and plump, indeed cherubic in face and person and pink-and-white of skin. His almost too faultless attire, and the meticulous perfection



with which he was invariably barbered and manicured, were perhaps more in character.

But the more I studied him — cautiously and furtively, from the shelter of my stand — the harder it became to reconcile what I was told of him with what I seemed to see. He radiated no sinister charm, but a naïve and almost childlike delight in his own conspicuous well-being and in the roses life was continually strewing in the path of the favored nephew, ward, and heir of Henry Sigel.

The thing that bewildered me most about Jerome Sigel was my early discovery that he was aware of his own evil reputation, and took an honest pride in it. He was pleasurably conscious of my horrified gaze as he went strolling through the Plaza foyer in the evening; so much so that he began encouraging it by casual soliloquies, addressed to no one in particular, but neatly pitched to reach simultaneously the ears of the girl behind the candy counter, the one in charge of the florist's shop, and the one at the news-stand. The burden of these remarks invariably was speculation as to whether or not there might be any girl around that evening who would be willing to let him escort her home, and 'struggle for her honor all the way.'

This was, of course, as even then I began dimly to suspect, both sarcasm and bravado. I hadn't yet learned what Jerry Sigel well knew. It wasn't any of the 'Broadway crowd,' or, as in those days of the earliest 'Western' melodramas we had learned to call them, 'the rustler bunch,' who ever made themselves seriously annoying or embarrassing to the news-stand and shop girls, the telephone operators, or any of the other young women employed in the hotel in capacities that threw them into contact with the guests.

Perhaps it was due to nothing more than the fact that they had plenty of more easily acquired playmates; perhaps to contempt for the type of man who had neither the sense nor the decency to refrain from persecuting a girl whose job put her in a comparatively defenseless position. For whatever reason, Jerome Sigel and his kind actually left strictly alone the girl who had work to do.

And yet, in the end, he did, one night, escort me home.

The final precipitant of the chain of circumstances, I feel sure now, was my own overstimulated imagination. It was that which convinced me, on this particular evening, that the Master Deceiver had singled me out for a special sly scrutiny as he strolled, with seeming carefree aimlessness, about the corridors. And this in turn could mean only one thing — that he had at last devised a plan of such subtlety and ingenuity that with it he felt confident of encompassing my downfall.

So extraordinarily subtle, indeed, was his plan, that it included a more frank approach than he had ever made toward me before. Immediately after his leisurely emergence from the dining-room, he had wandered over to the stand to deliver, to myself and my even younger assistant, an airily phrased but extremely shrewd lecture on the economics of our job. Now that it is twenty-odd years too late, I often reflect that it is a thousand pities that it was so completely wasted. The theme of his discourse was the duty we owed to ourselves to lay thriftily aside as much as possible of the cash value of the endless presents which poured incessantly into the hands of a Plaza news-stand girl — presents which, in fact, she literally could not refuse.

‘Orchids are very beautiful,’ said the man who proba-

bly bought more of them than anybody else in New York, lounging at his ease against our counter and emphasizing the points of his discourse with gestures of a plump, white, and manicured hand, 'but they're not as beautiful as they are expensive. You've no idea how much my respect for your intelligence would rise if I caught you calling a boy to take them quietly back to the florist's shop to be credited to you for cash.

'If you want a few roses or carnations or violets to take home to your mother, get them from the Greek over on Columbus Circle, for about one twentieth of the money they'll allow you here on the orchids.'

(At this point, remembering that on the previous Sunday I had, 'just for the fun of it,' offered an orchid to our Maltese cat, and that he had devoured it eagerly, I had the grace to blush slightly.)

'As for the rest of the money, the savings bank is a wonderful institution, with which you should be better acquainted. It will prove a better friend to you than all the guests of this hotel put together.

'Let us now proceed to the subject of candy. You, young woman, are perhaps seventeen. Neither your figure nor your complexion has yet given you the slightest cause for worry. But unless you send back about ninety-nine per cent of the candy I daily see being showered upon you, and collect the cash for it—also to be added to your savings account—they soon will.

'Silk stockings, now, are something else again. How many pairs of silk stockings does one girl really need? It's hardly for me to say; but it would surprise me to learn that any girl who's not in the show business requires more than twenty-four pairs at any one time.

Why not send the rest back to the stores they came from, and get credit for them?’

That was a home thrust; I had, out of curiosity, counted up my supply of stockings — all presents — not long before, and found I had seventy-six pairs. But the only thoughts for which my mind really had room just then were compounded of discomfort and distrust at the audacity of this ‘notorious rounder’ in thus forcing his unwelcome conversation upon us; and in public, too! He should have realized that it was as much as a girl’s reputation was worth merely to be seen in his company. That his advice was not only shrewd but well-meant and sincere; that he might indeed be inspired by a genuine liking, free from the slightest taint of self-interest, for ‘that kid at the news-stand,’ was of course the last idea that could have entered my head.

Perhaps, too, sheer fatigue and acute physical discomfort played their parts in my inability to concentrate upon his words of counsel. For in those days I took extremely seriously what seemed to me almost a sacred obligation; to be at all times, and at whatever cost in physical agony, attired in a manner worthy of my position as queen of the news-stand in New York’s smartest hotel. And if you cannot remember what it entailed to be a properly costumed and smart young business woman of 1908 or thereabouts, you need only to consult the ‘Gibson girl’ pictures and the A. B. Wenzell magazine illustrations of that unhappy, far-off era.

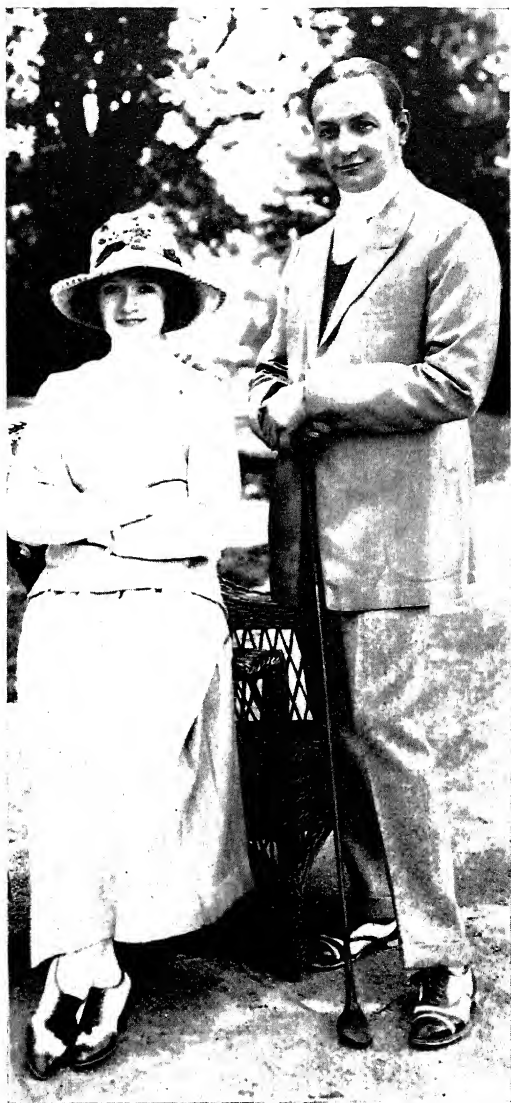
I myself remember it all too well — especially the martyrdom it required. How those high, whalebone-stiffened Marie de Médicis collars, pinned to the thick rolls of hair behind your ears, could itch! And how

often you simply had to step back out of sight behind a stack of novels and force your fingers, or at least a couple of lead pencils, down under your belt, to produce a momentary after-illusion of relief from the dull torture of stays which since before six o'clock that morning had been gripping your silly wasp-waist like an iron girdle straight out of the Inquisition!

But not even eighteen unbroken hours of bodily torment were able to drive my growing apprehensions from my mind as midnight and the close of my tour of duty drew on apace. I still caught glimpses, every now and then, of Jerome Sigel, casually in evidence here and there in the far vistas of the foyer. That he might actually be loitering there for other reasons, and with other matters on his mind than the fiendish intention of forcing his unwelcome escort on me when I left for home, never entered my self-important young head.

And then, perhaps fifteen minutes before the crucial moment, came a providential diversion. In through the Fifty-Ninth Street entrance and across the foyer to the hotel desk came hurrying the Mephistophelean figure of Florenz Ziegfeld.

I did not know then what I learned long afterward: that the long and intimate friendship between Jerome Sigel and Florenz Ziegfeld was a rarely sincere one, and much to both men's credit. Still, it had its practical side also, based chiefly upon Ziegfeld's appreciation of Sigel's gifts as a combined barometer and thermometer in the forecasting of the probable popular appeal of his new theatrical offerings. 'Flo' Ziegfeld had, if possible, even less confidence than most creative artists either in his own critical judgment or in his own sense of the commercial possibilities of his own productions. But he



*Keystone View Co.*

FLORENZ ZIEGFELD AND BILLIE BURKE



had learned by repeated tests that Jerome Sigel's reactions matched, with uncanny accuracy, the norm of the Ziegfeld audience.

If Jerome Sigel responded but languidly to a new show's charms at rehearsal, depend upon it, that show lacked something and must, if necessary, be ruthlessly torn apart and reassembled in a wholly different form. But if Jerry warmed to enthusiasm for the new show and for any of the new girls whom it revealed (the word 'revealed' is used advisedly, even when speaking of those earlier 'Follies'), the producer could dismiss all anxiety from his mind. All New York, and all strangers within its ferry, bridge, or tunnel gates, would soon be shouldering each other at his box-office windows.

But nothing of this was suspected by the various younglings like me, who observed with trepidation the practical inseparability of the 'heartless rounder' and the 'sinister producer,' and their apparent growing fondness for the Plaza.

On this particular night Ziegfeld paused scarcely five seconds at the hotel desk before turning and heading, with that queer cat-like bounding gait of his, straight for the news-stand. This made things worse. Obviously the night clerk had told him that Mr. Sigel was not in his room, and had probably suggested that I might know where he was to be found. And at ~~that~~ very moment, as though to confirm the insinuation, out from behind a column barely ten steps away popped the cause of my apprehensions. Ziegfeld seized his arm, and the two, deep in low-voiced talk, walked away together toward the Palm Room.

Heaven, notoriously protective (as Marie Dressler was at about that same time proclaiming from a Broadway



stage) toward the Working Girl, had obviously offered this one slim chance of escape from the Pursuing Villain. For the first time in my business career I gave my employers short change in my working hours by at least ten minutes. I cleared the counter in a single sweep, locked the cabinets, snatched hat and coat and gloves, and scuttled as inconspicuously as possible along the wall to the Fifty-Ninth Street entrance.

Big Tom, the great-hearted ancient in gold-braided grenadier uniform who acted as carriage man, was still on duty; indeed, the late after-theater supper rush was almost due. Big Tom was a friend of mine; he too had been at the Waldorf, and he loved to talk of the Ireland from which both he and my grandfather had come — and to which, only a few years later, he returned, with thirty thousand dollars, the fruits of years of thriftily saved and conservatively invested tips.

Pausing only to whisper to him to tell anybody who might ask that I had gone east across Fifth Avenue, I scampered westward, preferring to run all the way to Columbus Circle for an Eighth Avenue car rather than wait in the dangerously bright lights of the hotel entrance for the usual Fifty-Ninth Street cross-town one.

## VIII

Just west of the hotel, where the Plaza Annex now stands, was a huge old-fashioned apartment house, built on the same luxuriously stuffy scale as those tremendous and ancient monuments of the Haircloth Sofa Age farther west, the once-famed 'Spanish Flats.' Scurry-

ing past its iron-grilled plate-glass door, I glanced casually through it — and stopped dead.

At that instant a huge blazing clot of greasy flame, in size and shape grotesquely suggesting a damned soul returning to the Pit, had gone floating down the open elevator shaft at the rear of the dimly lighted hall, sending orange flickerings over the tapestried walls and glinting on the empty suits of armor on either side of the vestibule.

Pure horror held me paralyzed, though for an instant I could not even grasp what it was that I had seen. But in the next moment there was an eruption of sparks; and then from below roared a great serpent of flame that shot straight up the shaft, throwing out oily black curls of smoke that choked the hall and vestibule. Then I came to myself with a gasp, whirled, and ran desperately back toward the hotel, calling frantically for Tom. The terror in my voice brought him in a stumbling run to meet me. He took one glance into that door and the cyclone of flame in the elevator shaft. As he turned there was a guttering roar, and a tinkle of falling glass as fire burst from one window after another, four and five stories above our heads. Huge billows of black smoke cut off the sky, then swooped in a sudden down draft and wrapped us in choking darkness.

‘Get clear, miss! Get clear!’ shouted Tom. ‘I’m afther callin’ the firemen!’ And he was gone.

The smoke pall lifted. Some instinct led me to run on westward, toward my home, and then to bolt like a rabbit into the first doorway on the far side of the burning building.

Fifty-Ninth Street was already in an uproar. A moment earlier it had just begun to flow smoothly full

of prancing horses, broughams, barouches, and hansom cabs, interspersed with the already numerous motor-cars, and the sidewalk in front of the hotel was becoming a glistening river of silk-hatted men and jeweled, fur-wrapped women. In one wink it was turned into indescribable confusion. Policemen plunged among the panic-stricken horses, struggling to clear the way for the fire-engines that were already heralded by screaming siren and madly clanging gong.

Somehow, by a series of miracles, the street was cleared, and into the open space charged the fire-engines and the long centipedes of the ladder trucks, jumping the curb as they deployed across the whole width of the street. Green patrol-wagons with clamoring gongs dumped platoons of big brass-buttoned men in blue who flourished night sticks and, adding hearty Irish curses to the uproar, shoved hamlike hands into haughty faces and well-fed stomachs. With no particular gentleness, they eventually contrived to push the solid mass of the crowd back to a safe distance.

All the while a badly scared and completely fascinated girl crouched in her doorway refuge, far inside the fire lines. She saw the firemen run squirrel-like up the sheer face of the building, climbing one scaling ladder and unfastening, as they climbed, a second ladder from their belts to hook over a still higher window-ledge and go on without a second's break in the ascent. She saw the long wavering tips of the extension ladders, like antennae of gigantic mechanical insects, swing up and grope toward other windows, and firemen, clinging like gnats to their tips, leap out across empty space into belching smoke before the ladders were even close to the window sills.

As one after another the climbing men disappeared, there was a pause. Then from the vast crowd in the street went up a sort of awe-struck moan. The firemen were coming back. One after another their burly figures appeared upon the window-ledges, and in their arms or over their shoulders were white shapes. Back down the ladders they came, but gently now and carefully. Some of those white figures writhed convulsively, imperiling their own and their rescuers' lives, and their screams were continuous, appalling, and sickening. Some added a touch so grotesque as to be almost comic, kicking their bare legs in futile protest against the Gargantuan impropriety, the unbearable indignity of so shattering an invasion of the privacy of their slumbers. And some were brought down limp and still.

As each new figure, in its turn, appeared at a window, that same huge inarticulate sound — a vast 'O-o-oh!' that had in it more of awe than sympathy — went up from the huge crowd. And through and under it, through the crackling roar of the flames and the hiss and splash of water, went on the *thumpa-thumpa-thumpa* of the engines.

Three of those white, still figures were laid in the doorway at my very feet. I can see now the awkwardly stooping figure of one big fireman as, after gently putting his burden down, he tried with clumsy hands to adjust the scorched nightgown more decently.

'Can I do anything?' white-faced but valiantly I quavered.

'Not for them you can't, I'm afraid, miss,' he answered wearily. 'The ambulance doc will be here in a minute, but he's got his hands full right now with some that's still got a chance. These here are the folks from the

fourth floor; they were right in the middle of the worst of it, and we were lucky to be able to get 'em out at all.'

The bitter fight went on and on. It had settled down now to a steady, relentless pressure upon a wild beast that still roared and threatened, but little by little sullenly gave ground. Somewhere far off a chime rang its changes; a big bell tolled one deep note. But it was a tap on my shoulder that at last broke the spell.

'You've had about enough of this,' said a familiar voice. 'Too much. It's time for you to go home.'

It was Jerome Sigel. That lurking shadow of mischief had gone from his face. He looked tired and troubled.

'Thank you, Mr. Sigel,' I said, trying hard to keep the quaver out of my voice. 'I don't know how long I've been here. I must go right home.'

'Yes,' he said, and the impish light was reawakened in his eye. 'And I am going to take you there. Let's go get a cab.'

'Oh no, no, no, Mr. Sigel,' said I hurriedly, suddenly emerging, under the stimulus of an older fear, from the trance which had held me for an hour. 'You needn't; you really needn't — all I have to do is to get a car right here, transfer at the Circle, and go straight up to 104th Street. Mother will be at the window watching every car that stops. She must have been waiting for an hour. She will be horribly worried. Please, I'm all right, Mr. Sigel — thank you so much...'

'A cab will be much quicker,' said Jerome Sigel decisively. 'Don't be silly.'

He fairly bundled me, still protesting, but more faintly, into a taxicab — where I promptly dived into the far corner like a rabbit into its hole. If I could, I would have burrowed into the cushions. It was, as a matter

of fact, my first experience with a taxicab; and here I found myself, late at night, alone in one with a man — and the man, of all the predatory males of New York City, was the notorious Jerry Sigel!

That monster of iniquity, grinning like a roly-poly hyena, promptly proceeded to burlesque my actions, shrinking back as far as possible into the opposite corner and holding his cane, gripped firmly in both hands, as a defensive barrier between us.

‘One Hundred and Fourth Street and Central Park West,’ he called to the driver. To my utter bewilderment he failed to add, ‘Drive through the park.’

I wedged myself more firmly into my corner. Obviously the omission of that standard device of the predatory, against which I had so many times been warned by more experienced fellow workers, could only cloak some still deeper and more dangerous design. But there were in those days equally standard defensive tactics for imperiled female virtue — tactics familiar to any follower of Al Woods’s immortal melodramas. (At least they would have been immortal if they hadn’t been forgotten so soon.) My hand went up to my head and fumbled for the reassuring knob of the long skewer which held in place my flat, wide-brimmed, straw ‘soup-plate.’

A chuckle came from the sinister figure in the other corner.

‘Well,’ observed Jerome Sigel, ‘getting ready for a Battle for Your Honor may at least help you to forget that horrible business at the fire.’

Following that first observation, he spoke exactly twice more during our three-mile ride. The lights at each successive street corner revealed his cherubic

countenance beaming placidly, in amiable self-satisfaction mingled with friendly concern, upon me. For an abandoned villain he bore a puzzling resemblance to a Boy Scout in the midst of his good deed for the day.

Once he called my attention to the beauty of the skyline of Fifth Avenue, across the park, and the delicate tracery of the trees against the sky, both of them silhouetted by the wavering glare from the gas plants along the East River. I preserved a stony silence.

Presently he suggested that I might prefer to have the cab trail a north-bound Eighth Avenue car, and let me out just behind it as we came to 104th Street, so that I might appear to have descended from the trolley and thus conceal my guilt in having been brought home in a cab by a man. My rejection of this artful proposal exploded with all the abrupt vehemence of a firecracker, and brought a loud laugh from him, which had scarcely died away when we drew up before my home.

Jerome Sigel sprang nimbly out; had I been a duchess, I could not have been more ceremoniously handed down to the sidewalk. I waved to Mother, anxiously awaiting me in the front window as I had known she would be. He gallantly raised his hat to her, preceded me to the outer door, opened it, and bowed me into the vestibule.

As I turned to forestall any attempt on his part to follow me further, I discovered that he was already halfway back down the front steps. He paused on the sidewalk, leered impudently up at me, waved a taunting finger, and called out:

‘That’s the time I fooled you, little girl!’

It really did not take as long as you might suppose, however, after that night, for the realization to pene-

trate my prejudice-incased young skull that I had played the vain and conceited fool, and thereby had given Jerry Sigel a wholly unnecessary amount of amusement at my expense.

Naturally the first effect of this discovery was to make me still more furious with him, which, equally naturally, still further increased his amusement. But this gradually gave place to a more wholesome humility, out of which I emerged with a better understanding of Jerry Sigel, and, somewhat to my own surprise, a genuine liking for him.

We eventually arrived, by this means, at a wholly comfortable footing of mutual banter, accompanied on his part by various small friendly attentions. I remember that he presented me with a book of tickets entitling me to rides in the taxicabs of the Mason-Seaman Company, in which either he or his uncle had an interest; his accompanying comment being that, having personally subjected me to thorough test, he knew now, and would if necessary assure my mother, that I could be trusted in any taxicab.



# 3

## CLOUD-CUCKOOLAND

### I

CECIL B. DE MILLE pays his regiment of leading ladies — if you are to believe, as you should, his regiment of press-agents — anything from twenty-five hundred dollars a week up, apiece.

When I was his leading lady — not merely one of his leading ladies, but all the leading lady he had — my salary was \$75 a week when I got it; and I didn't get it.

When Cecil B. De Mille wants to negotiate a new contract with one of the expensive leading ladies already mentioned, it is, I have heard, frequently his custom to have Mrs. De Mille invite her for a week-end on his yacht. I haven't seen it, but I understand it is quite a nice yacht.

When he wanted me to sign that seventy-five-dollar-a-week contract, he took me to dinner. The check was two dollars, and he borrowed that from me.

Something is wrong somewhere.

Not so long ago, *After Dark*, a burlesqued revival of one of the famous old melodramas at the Rialto Theater in Hoboken, pulled half New York across the river, crowded the ferry-boats, 'laid 'em in the aisles,' and 'turned 'em away.' Seats sold for eighteen weeks ahead.

When I was playing in an even more famous melodrama, *The Two Orphans*, at the Rialto Theater in Hoboken, if anybody conceivably had tried to buy seats even one week in advance I think our box-office man would have leaped through the window and kissed him, hoping all the time that he was no worse than a harmless eccentric and that no keepers would pounce on him before he got out of the foyer. And I always dreaded that ferry ride home after the show, because I was always the only woman on the boat, and often enough the only passenger.

As I said before, something is wrong somewhere.

The trouble is that although I know very well what it is, I don't see just what can be done about it. For the only thing that is wrong is the fact that I was Cecil B. De Mille's leading lady, and I played in revivals of the old melodramas, at the wrong time for such activities to do me any good; and what makes it still worse is that this wrong time was such a long time ago. It wasn't Cecil's fault; it wasn't the old Rialto's; I don't even think it was mine. The Time Spirit merely was never propitious to me.

If any individual can be made to shoulder blame, I would nominate Fred Sterry — for his decision to admit to the Plaza's socially impeccable corridors sundry persons connected with the stage. He can hardly have given a thought to the possible effect of closer acquaintance with the theater's most glamorous personalities upon his news-stand girl; but that didn't keep the effect from being produced. And after a few months of daily contact with Fritzi Scheff, with Julia Marlowe, with William Gillette, and with Minnie Maddern Fiske — I was stage-struck beyond recall.

'Stage-struck' meant something in those times that I really do not think it quite means any longer. Nor do I believe that youths today are 'movie-struck' or 'radio-struck' with that peculiar intensity some of us experienced before the movies had o'erleaped the world, and when radio still was unknown.

So much of the grip of the stage upon our young imaginations was due to the fact that it was still a unique and incomparable institution.

Over in New Jersey a man named De Forest was experimenting with a 'wireless telephone'; and all over the country humble folk were crowding into converted grocery-stores which they called 'nickelodeons' to watch pictures which invariably wound up by sending the entire cast careering madly across back fences and through vacant lots. But nobody yet saw any threat to the great institution — the stage of Irving, of Booth, of Mansfield — in these things; or even in the fact that nickelodeon proprietors were finding that they could increase their crowds by advertising The Biograph Girl — Mary Pickford.

To be sure, here and there a critic had condescended to notice that John Bunny's gift for comic pantomime seemed actually to have gained by his queer decision to risk social damnation by playing in the pictures. And a little Englishman named Chaplin was doing a drunk sketch in small-time vaudeville, and not doing it very well, either.

But there before my eyes went daily all the flash and sparkle of the stage — the only real stage — in Fritzi; and all its dignity and beauty in the incomparable Julia Marlowe. It has been my fate to remember those glowing first impressions too vividly and well. And it

is in the blood of us Irish to give our hearts to lost causes.

Still, I might have gone on merely dreaming if it hadn't been for, of all persons, Jerry Sigel. For one evening he brought with him up to my stand a gentleman of what is best described as a deliberately Satanic appearance—at sight of whom my heart entirely stopped beating.

'Young lady,' said Jerome Sigel gravely, without a trace of the usual bantering tone, 'Mr. Ziegfeld is planning a Nell Brinkley number for his new show. He needs six or eight girls who can look the part; and what's a whole lot harder, he doesn't want just the regular run of beautiful dolls—he wants 'em all to have plenty of personality, snap, and go.

'I've already found him one; a little girl named Mae Murray. But it just occurred to me today that here you are, and have been all the time, putting across just what he's looking for from behind that stand of yours. How'd you like to try your luck on the stage?'

Somehow I managed to keep my feet on the ground long enough to convince Mr. Ziegfeld that I'd like it a whole lot; and pausing only long enough to tell me to report at the stage door of the New York Theater next morning, both men strolled away.

But that stage door did not see me, next morning or any other morning. I had unfortunately forgotten another person who had a word to say—my mother.

Mother heard me out quite calmly when I flew home to tell her of the miracle; then spoke. Her remarks were brief and to the point. No daughter of hers was ever going on the stage as a show girl. Even to be a show

girl in an ordinary show would be bad enough; but everybody knew what a wicked man Mr. Ziegfeld was, and what abominations his shows were. Why, it was reported that in his latest, the show girls wore gowns that were slit up one side until you could see nearly to their knees!

But indirectly that lost chance provided my open door. My entire family experienced, at my hands, three days of acute misery; at the end of which mother relented sufficiently to offer me a consolation prize. Since I was so set upon a theatrical career, I might aim for the starry heights of the 'legitimate.'

The moment that permission was won, I was ready. I knew exactly what to do. My hours behind the news-stand hadn't exclusively been spent in covert efforts to duplicate the exact carriage of Miss Marlowe's head, the precise rhythm of her walk, and the turn of her arm. Hidden in one of my cupboards and already practically learned by heart were the circulars, the catalogue, and the prospectus of an 'academy of dramatic art.'

## II

Is there any more cruel racket on earth than the merry game of exploiting the ambitions of youth? Or one that changes less in its fundamentals? Nowadays the baits are careers in the movies or on the radio; soon, I suppose, you will be offered a practically sure job in television. But what all except one in ten thousand will get out of it, I know: heartbreak.

Perhaps there is no other way for youth to learn.

I know that once I had my mother's permission, no human being could have headed me off. Part of my argument at home had been that I had 'money of my own'; and so, indeed, I had. Here also thanks were in part due to Jerry Sigel. Even before his lecture I had begun to save, though in rather haphazard fashion; and his advice had enabled me to put over two thousand dollars in the savings bank. Far less would have been needed to convince the management of any dramatic school that I possessed great promise as an emotional actress.

Of course it was not until long afterward that I realized this; or that on the day I strode into that school with the light of a great purpose in my eye, to most onlookers I was just another sucker. Those things do take so long to dawn upon you! But having chosen the stage name that I was to make immortal, everything else between my matriculation and the appearance of 'Ruth Roger' in electric lights on Broadway would of course prove mere minor detail.

Naturally, too, on the day I bade farewell to the Plaza, I already foresaw my triumphant return a few years later, this time as a guest; and could hear the whispers in which my romantic story flew from lip to lip as I swept, with Miss Marlowe's own queenly grace, into the dining-room. But I would stop to speak graciously to my successor at the news-stand, and laughingly recall some of the episodes of my service there.

The queer thing about that dramatic school as I look back upon it is the fact that there really were things useful for an actress to know that could be learned there. But there is a wide gap between learning how to do the things that an actress must know

how to do, and learning how to be an actress — a thing which nobody took the trouble to tell us.

All (or almost all) of us worked hard and faithfully. Of course there were (there always are) one or two bored young beauties being 'educated' at some kind gentleman's expense, to whom the school was just one more way of killing time.

But most of us went religiously through all the motions — our fencing lessons and our dancing lessons and our posture drills and French and voice culture and make-up instruction — nor ever saw anything incongruous in the fact that our dancing master had a stiff knee and our instructor in elocution suffered from chronic throat trouble. And when the great stars of the stage of those days came by invitation to preach to us, we listened with every nerve strained to permit no drop of inspiration to escape.

Just one little thing, I know now, did escape us — a trifling quality that I can only, and inadequately, describe as the feel of the stage. It isn't anything you can put into words, that sense of the art of the theater as a living reality and itself at the same time, for you, just part of the job of life. But I cannot conceive of anybody getting anywhere on the stage without it, any more than I can conceive of their learning it at my dramatic school — or any other.

It may not be the fault of the school at all. Perhaps it is the curse of all schools that they can never take on the authentic atmosphere of reality. You cannot make yourself believe that you are really working at anything, even acting, when you know all the time you are only pretending to work at it.

Of course we took our prescribed courses (and our-

selves) with tremendous seriousness. The amateur almost always takes the game more seriously than the professional; and perhaps somewhere just there is the very reason why the professional excels — I don't know.

Still and all, there were girls in that school with me whose stage careers weren't entirely ruined by their experience. There was, for instance, Jane Cowl; and there was another girl with whom I fell into a particularly confidential friendship.

In those days she was 'Gyp,' but that ancient nickname has probably long since been forgotten. She had, then, just one specialty: she could make up and play in character as an old woman in most uncannily convincing fashion. The world has since had a chance to see Mary Alden in a great many other rôles. I wonder now and then whether she still remembers that little furnished room in Brooklyn, and the long talks about our 'art' across the luncheon table in the little old Hotel Grenoble.

There was another and a greater Mary in those days whom we both worshipped from afar. Thanks to old news-stand acquaintance with the press-agent at the Manhattan Opera House, we had the treasured privilege of the run of the place; and rehearsals usually found us tucked into an orchestra chair apiece, or even a stage box, following with eyes, ears, and soul everything that went on upon the stage.

No more magnificent theatrical venture than Oscar Hammerstein's Manhattan Opera Company was ever tried. It is given, surely, to few little Jewish cigar-makers to rise to the point of challenging, on its own ground, the world's most glitteringly entrenched theatrical institution; artistically, at least, far surpassing it;



and coming within a hair or two of complete success. And we were looking on at the very birth of those glories.

Upon a single afternoon, there and then, we might be privileged to hear and see in rehearsal on that stage Jeanne Gerville-Réache; Lina Cavalieri; Lucien Murtore; Pol Plançon; Maurice Renaud — no greater singing actor and few greater actors of any type than he have ever lived — and yet, in that company, it seemed to me, watching, one woman, by the sheer force and fire of her personality, mastered them all.

The first time I saw her, I had slipped mouselike through the door into the huge, dark auditorium, scuttled down the aisle and made myself inconspicuous in a middle-row orchestra chair just as the rehearsal was beginning. Up on the stage the mixed crowd of young music students and veteran professionals that composed the chorus was being taken through the opening scene of *Sappho*.

Down by the footlights was a little table with one or two men standing beside it. Over at the foot of the left aisle, just back from the railing of the orchestra pit, stood a little dark pot-bellied man in a frock coat, his hands jammed in his trousers pockets and a most extraordinary hat — a shiny black truncated cone with a broad, flat brim — on his head.

He had his head bent forward and was watching the stage from beneath his heavy eyebrows, and was talking in an undertone to another man who stood beside him, but toward whom he never so much as glanced. To graceless me, the thing to be remembered was the comical way in which his little graying goatee vibrated up and down as he talked.

No matter how many times after that I saw Oscar



OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN, GENIUS OF THE MANHATTAN OPERA  
COMPANY



Hammerstein at rehearsals, I never, that I remember, heard him raise his voice. Nor did I ever see him sit down, or even stand long in one spot. He was always present, but always wandering like an unquiet ghost in the vast gloom of the auditorium, his eyes never off the stage.

Just now there was bustle and commotion there. The scene roared upward to a climax. In from the wings burst a tall woman with red hair, in a skin-tight black satin gown and white gloves which the fiery energy of her hands made the most conspicuous feature of her costume. So tempestuous was her rush down to the footlights, so instantaneous her complete domination of the whole scene, that at first I did not even notice how beautiful she was.

She had scarcely reached the front of the stage when she stopped short; and the whole scene stopped with her. There must have been an official stage manager somewhere around; but he had probably already learned his place. Mary Garden was in command.

'Don't be so scary!' she blazed out upon the chorus, who were supposed to rush hilariously about her, and who had done so with about as much freedom as you would expect from chorus men in approaching the star. 'Grab me! Maul me! What are you afraid of? I won't bite you! Put some life into it!'

Back she went again and repeated the impetuous rush of her entrance, this time with better effect; but she had not sung ten bars before once more she halted.

'Wait a minute,' she called. 'That isn't going so well. Try that last bit over again,' and as simply and naturally as a child and as gracefully as a cat she walked over to the prompter's box and curled down on top of

it for a second attack upon the high note that had baffled her.

This time, as she came to the critical point, she broke into a laugh that came so easily and naturally and seemed so spontaneous and appropriate to the scene, that once again it dawned upon me only gradually that she had inserted it deliberately for the sole purpose of deftly evading a note beyond the compass of her voice.

That was Mary Garden — not a great singer; in fact, from the point of view of voice alone, scarcely a mediocre one — but a great, a superb actress; and what is more than that, a great personality. Her career was achieved in a field that in those days still seemed to most Americans a rather queer and exotic one, suitable only for 'foreigners.' And that fact unfairly obscured the thoroughly American character of her whole personality and temperament. No other country in the world could possibly have produced her.

It has always seemed to me, indeed, that of all the people I have ever known, Mary Garden and Theodore Roosevelt were as much alike as it was humanly possible for a woman opera star and a male politician to be. They were amazingly alike both in their native characteristics and in the tricks of personality they both knew so well how to use — such as an appearance of devastating frankness that covered, in reality, much caution and an extraordinary intuition for the right moment in which, and the right person to whom, to be frank. To say nothing of a news sense that would have made either of them a great managing editor.

## III

We had an instructor in stage direction and management at the school to whom we all looked up with awe, because unlike practically all our other instructors, he was 'real' — that is to say, he had himself written and helped to produce a couple of plays that had gained some measure of success on Broadway.

What also counted for much with us, he both looked and behaved precisely as we firmly believed a stage director should and did. Which means that he was tall and thin and bald, with a long, intellectual face and long thin hands, and dressed as a playwright should, even to the broad black ribbon on his eye-glasses; and that he was both witty and unsparing in his ceaseless criticism of even the least little detail of our work. His name was William C. De Mille.

It was not until we became 'advanced students' that we came under his supervision, but the experience was one worth working and waiting for. Billy De Mille possessed an excellent sense of theatrical values; and he never in his life gave a better demonstration of that fact than he did in creating, for our benefit, his own rôle of stage director.

Certainly no mere commercial stage director of my later experience could, or did, shake both hands at heaven or brandish them at the stage with quite such convincing fury; and though I have many times since been yelled at more loudly, none of the phrases used for my instruction have stuck in my memory quite so vividly as his . . . 'F'Gahd's sake, Roger, put some GUTS into it!'

Unfortunately, after I had heard this daily for several

weeks, with variations and amplifications, the conviction began gradually to worm its way into my mind that Billy was picking on me. I tried to keep count of the relative frequency and violence of his explosions when aimed at me and when aimed at the other girls, and had no trouble at all in concluding that I was getting considerably more than my share.

From this it was a short step to seeing myself as the goat of the class, and to losing all the joy I had taken in my stage career. These things are bad and tragic medicine when you are twenty. From looking forward eagerly to each new day's work I came to dreading the moment when that cutting voice would concentrate mercilessly upon some tiny slip — and of course the slips themselves became more numerous as I became more rattled and sullen.

It was perfectly plain to me — as such things are when you are twenty — that either he had taken an intense personal dislike to me, or as stage material I must be utterly hopeless. I tried desperately to believe it was only the first, and to carry it off defiantly; but in my heart I knew it was my own incompetence, and that my career had already ended in failure — in blank, utter failure and black despair! At twenty, things are like that.

Fortunately, I had a tower of strength and a never-failing source of consolation in Gyp Alden; Gyp, with her hard young wisdom and her shrewd cynical philosophy. Gyp Alden at twenty knew more about life than I ever will; and knew that she knew it, too.

'Forget it, Roger,' was her counsel (in sign of our terrific sophistication we always addressed each other, at the school, by our last names. Everybody in those

days knew that was the way to address real actresses). 'As a matter of fact, it's the other way around. It's because he sees more possibilities in you than he does in any of the rest of us that he jumps you hardest.'

That was wonderfully consoling, but of course quite impossible for me to believe. At twenty you cling too fiercely to your grievance and your chance to suffer and despair. Still, I did permit Gyp to coax my emotional barometer up far enough each day to take me through that day's ordeal.

We were working with all our might upon what was to be the climax of the school year — a performance of *The Good Hope* in which I was to have the rôle that had been created by Ellen Terry.

Somehow the great day came; and at the last moment, while I was waiting in the wings, Billy De Mille came up to me — to me alone, of all the class! — and remarked quite casually:

'Miss Roger, why don't you go down to my mother's office and have a talk with my brother Cecil? You know, mother is an agent and play broker, and Cecil is planning to go into producing. He may have something interesting to offer you.'

It still sticks in my mind that for a green youngster I gave rather a good performance in *The Good Hope* that day.

It was just a 'school show'; my audience was a little knot of teachers, fellow-pupils, and friends and relatives of the cast. I doubt if a single disinterested person was present; if there were one he must have wandered into the theater by accident. But if someone did just that, he did not waste his afternoon.

I can remember so well the feeling of immense power,



the tremendous force and vitality that were in me in those days. There was no hill I could not climb, no obstacle I could not subdue. Green youngster that I was, I hurled myself into that starkly tragic rôle with a passion of sincerity that, I know, made itself felt even by that queer parody of an audience.

That was so long ago — so many, many years ago!

#### IV

The school term ended that day. I was an actress. But I needed more than that knowledge. I needed, and badly, a job.

For once my good angel was by my side. The very next day I met, of all people, Jerome Sigel strolling along Broadway in all his cherubic glory. He hailed me jovially as ever; heard, with perhaps faintly ironic congratulations, of the triumphant conclusion of my school course, and promptly took my case in hand.

‘Don’t waste your time with the agents,’ said he. ‘You won’t get a tumble. It’s not only the wrong season, but you aren’t ready yet for Broadway. But there’s a fellow named Travers Vail who’s organizing a summer stock company to play over in Hoboken. He’s taken over the old Rialto there. Go tell him I sent you, and he’ll give you a job.’

About a week later, as nearly as I can remember, I made my actual, bona-fide ‘first appearance on any stage’ — in the old Rialto — as Floriane in *Zaza* (and ‘doubled’ as Madame Du Fresne in the last act).

It really is a most unpleasant feeling, this knowledge that you already belong to history — and comic history

at that. We worked so hard there in the old Rialto with our 'weekly change of bill,' our morning rehearsals for next week's performance, and our arguments over 'business' and the 'value' of some speech in *The Climbers* or *Brewster's Millions*! And Hoboken then, with its waterfront saloons, was as terrifying a place for a girl as it was later to become a fascinating one when we women obtained equal rights at the bar. It was only my devotion to my art — that same art they've had so much fun with, since, on that very stage — that kept me there all through one long, hot, trying summer.

I wonder how many young stage aspirants today would stick it out through even one week of *Brewster's Millions* every night and for three matinees, with a rehearsal of next week's bill every morning, in Hoboken, in July? And all the time, too, we must make all manner of desperate efforts to keep up appearances before our 'public.'

Just how we convinced ourselves that we had any public before whom to keep up appearances, I don't know. Hoboken persisted in a placid unawareness of our existence.

We were all desperately poor, or we shouldn't have been in that company. The Vails themselves (Mrs. Vail was our leading lady) were poorer than any of the rest of us, for their slim savings were all that financed the whole piteous venture. But we all 'played up' gallantly; we got so we didn't mind — very much — doing *The Two Orphans* to fifteen people in the orchestra and four in the balcony.

Every Wednesday, after the matinee, tea was served on the stage, and we ladies of the company played hostesses to our audience; it never was numerous enough to make this much of a task. And after the matinee also

came one bit of pretense that I could weep to think of, even now.

Mrs. Vail had been a stock and 'road-company' actress for fifteen years. She had never gotten any nearer to Broadway than this. In fact her position as leading lady in her husband's company was the apogee of her career; and she soon made it evident that she had definite ideas as to the off-stage rôle it required of her.

The Vails lived in an extremely modest boarding-house within two blocks of the theater, and ordinarily, even on rainy nights, they were quite content to walk back and forth from one to the other.

But after each matinee performance, about half an hour before the final curtain, a one-horse open barouche, drawn by a venerable and blasé white animal with feet the size of frying-pans, would clop-clop up to the curb opposite the Rialto stage door. The half-hour wait was a definite and important part of the procedure — it was intended to give the crowd, which the barouche in theory attracted, sufficient time to gather.

One of the first things to be forcibly impressed upon me, as soon as I became a member of the company, was the offense our leading lady would take were any of us lesser members of the cast so much as to show our noses outside the stage door, after the matinee performances, until she had made her own exit. And a remarkable exit it was. She would invariably stop just inside the door, in her street costume, and gather and poise herself precisely as when about to 'go on.' Then she would dart forth, registering vivacity and radiant charm, and followed by her colored maid, would bound airily into the open barouche.

Bowing, smiling, and throwing kisses right and left to

her 'dear public' (there might be as many as a dozen people on the sidewalk) she would be driven away. But not directly to the boarding-house — dear, no! in exactly the opposite direction. A circuit must be made of as many as possible of Hoboken's busiest streets, and the passersby be given every opportunity to nudge each other and whisper, 'There goes the leading lady of the Rialto Theater!'

Two hours later, after dusk, Mrs. Vail would walk quietly back to the theater, alone; and like all the rest of us, would dress and make up for the evening performance, entirely unassisted. The colored maid, too, was merely part of the scenery!

The real trouble with it all was that Travers Vail and his stock company were either twenty years too late, or twenty years too soon — and now it doesn't in the least matter which. It took my green innocence much longer to see our case in its true light than it did such comparative veterans as Sam Hardy, our leading man. He saw, I think, within two or three performances how matters stood. After that he devoted himself, in the best tradition of the trouser, to extracting all possible amusement, for himself and us, from our increasingly cheerless situation.

Sam seems to me in memory at least as funny in his 'straight' rôles as in some of the avowedly comic parts in which I have seen him since. But it was back-stage that his monkeyshines rose to heights of sheer genius, and helped us all in our nightly ordeal of going out to face more and more rows of empty seats.

Still, though I felt sorry for the Vails, I myself was not especially perturbed. I was getting actual stage experience, of sorts, and by living at home, going to and fro on the ferry, and by various other small economies, was

getting it without further inroads into a still fairly substantial savings account.

Early in August, to the surprise of nobody whatever, the Rialto Stock Company gave up the ghost.

## V

Probably if I had been sensible I should have promptly reported back to Jerry Sigel; and perhaps — who knows? — have found myself in a Ziegfeld show after all. But the things inside you that see to it that you take one road and reject another are every bit as real as the ones outside of you that you tumble over on whatever road you do take.

I went down to see Billy De Mille's brother Cecil.

I wonder if he himself remembers, now, those days when he too was young and eager and poor! Or how many people in the world besides me know that his first ambition had been to be an opera singer (he actually had made a professional *début* with a short-lived summer opera company in St. Louis) and that he had thought his life was over when, before he was thirty, his voice gave out.

And I wonder how many of his present millions Cecil would give to bring back the thick, dark, wavy hair that then was his!

He was an unknown and penniless producer; I an unknown and practically penniless actress. So it was, according to Broadway standards, the most natural thing in the world for me to place myself under his management. And if it rewarded neither of us in money, it was great fun while it lasted.

For a long while the 'management' consisted of a

daily shared luncheon and hours upon hours of talk — upon nothing but the eternal art of the theater; of stage technique, of what made our heroes and heroines great, and of what some day was going to make each of us as great in our several rôles as any of them.

Well, you've done even more startling things in many ways, Cecil, than in those days you dreamed of doing; and I suppose it's quite in accord with common human experience, that the things you've actually done, and the ones you dreamed of doing, have turned out to be so different from each other.

But it is queer to think of those days when the present world-famous overlord of the movies used to walk up Broadway with me so we could both gaze wistfully at that fur overcoat in the window of Brill Brothers — just the thing for a rising young theatrical producer, if only he could have afforded it! And then there was George Bronson-Howard's cloth-of-silver waistcoat which caused us both to break the tenth commandment — Cecil for himself, and me on his account.

It was understood at this time that I was to have the lead in a play of his own that he had 'practically ready to put in rehearsal,' as did every other young would-be producer, press-agent, and junior dramatic critic on Broadway in those halcyon years. But when, as was also in accord with universal custom, the delays in bringing out this first of the De Mille productions lengthened unaccountably, Cecil sent me over to Henry W. Savage's offices, and wrought so well in my behalf that, to my own pride and delight, I found myself chosen to lead the first road company in *Everywoman*, in which Laura Nelson Hall was then playing to crowded houses on Broadway. We went into rehearsal at once.

Then, after three weeks' hard work, the rumor went around that *Everywoman* was beginning to falter. It wasn't, after all, a big enough success to justify a road company. And a few days later came the curt announcement that our cast was dismissed. This was long before the days of 'Equity'; there was nothing for us to do but accept our dismissal, without a penny to show for our labors, and with no recourse whatever.

It was the custom of the time; the actor gambled his time and effort, and the producer gambled only his small incidental expenses. None the less, the consciences of the more decent producers occasionally troubled them; I think that was the reason why Colonel Savage shortly afterward stopped at our luncheon table to say that he was trying out voices that afternoon for a new operetta, and to ask if I cared to see what I could do.

I had never sung in public in my life. Except for what passed for such at the dramatic school, I had never had a music lesson. But I left the restaurant then and there, dashed to Macy's music counter, and started pawing furiously among the 'song hits of the day' for something I thought I could sing. My choice was a song I had heard Kitty Gordon sing in some show or other — I haven't the faintest notion now what the name of the show was, but the song had made a tremendous impression on me. It was called 'Ashes of Roses.'

Half an hour later I found myself one of a little group of taut-nerved girls, each with a roll of music clutched in her hand, on the gloomy stage of the old Gaiety Theater. It was a familiar enough scene, then and now, in the show business — a grand piano at one side with a single naked electric light bulb dangling down from the flies above it; the abysmally bored accompanist, with a

cigarette dangling from his lower lip, slouched over the keyboard, running scales, transposing when requested, and then thumping out the accompaniment for each anxious candidate in turn; the empty darkness beyond the footlights; the sepulchral echoes; and the little knot of silent and impassive judges.

My turn came at last. I gave one copy of 'Ashes of Roses' to the accompanist. He spread it on the music rack with one flick of a practiced wrist; banged away at the opening chords; and at the proper moment I opened my mouth and let anything occur that thought fit to happen.

Presently there weren't any more words to sing; so I stopped, closed my mouth, and waited. No hushed silence paid me tribute, nor did anybody rush forward rapturously to greet the new Jenny Lind. But a hand waved me toward a group at one side — considerably the smaller of the two groups into which the candidates were being sorted. I had passed the first test successfully.

Then, after the larger group had been dismissed, we were called up again, and again. We sang various familiar songs — sad songs and gay songs, comic songs and sentimental ones. And each time more aspiring singers fell by the wayside; but somehow, I hung on. And then at last it was over. Somebody said 'That's all, girls'; and somebody else said, 'Miss Roger?' and gave me a bundle of paper. I had a part — I was cast, I whose musical education had been picked up in evenings around the piano in a Harlem flat, for the contralto rôle in an operetta called *Little Boy Blue*. And the first rehearsal call was for tomorrow.

Curiously, I remember very little about that company or my experience with it. Gertrude Bryan, I remember,



had the leading rôle; but my own part was not at all an insignificant one. I remembered Fritzi Scheff as she used to scamper past my news-stand, and started an entirely new set of day-dreams.

But there must, without my suspecting it, have been more to operetta than just opening your mouth and letting the sounds come out. We were taken to Washington for a week before coming to New York. I sang my way happily through that week in Washington; and then the blow fell. *Little Boy Blue* when it opened in New York presented a new light-opera contralto; but her name was not Ruth Roger.

It would have been a far heavier blow but for the fact that when I reached his office 'my own manager' had great news for me. The new play, which was at one stroke to elevate him to the front rank among successful producers, was ready at last; and my leading rôle was ready for me — on certain conditions.

Those conditions were the familiar ones of 'shoestring' productions in those days, and for all I know, in these. Briefly, I and all the members of the company must share in the gamble by helping to finance the first production.

I never so much as hesitated, though it took a bit more than three-quarters of all the money I had left in the world. And when I read the play, I was as sure as its young author-producer that our fortunes were made. It was quite clear to me, even before he pointed it out — as you may be sure he did in the course of our first reading — that it had everything in it any play has ever needed to make it a tremendous box-office success. And so, in plain fact, it had. That was just the trouble.

Everything was in that play that the records of all the great stage triumphs of history, from *Hamlet* to

*The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, had demonstrated to be 'good theater.' There was only one ever-so-tiny thing wrong. That was the reason for their being in it.

It hadn't, you see, occurred to Cecil, and it certainly didn't occur to me, that those situations and 'pieces of business' had been so powerful only because they had at least seemed to arise inevitably out of the course of events — the story of the play. Whereas in our play every single one of them had been carefully, painstakingly, proudly, and happily carpentered in. They had all been successful in the play in which they had originally belonged; why shouldn't they be equally so in ours?

Well, we both had our lesson to learn; and Cecil learned it sooner, and has profited by it far more, than I did, or have. All this was so very long ago, when we were both young and eager, and a vast deal less experienced than we thought ourselves. And it is a quaint thought that this really was, literally, the very first production ever to be heralded by the magic words: 'Cecil B. De Mille Presents . . .'

We all believed in that play enthusiastically; our faith even survived three weeks of rehearsal. But of course that never proves anything. Three unbroken weeks of rehearsal of any play, though it really were another *Hamlet* — or another *Abie's Irish Rose* — can safely be guaranteed so thoroughly to ruin the judgment, so far as that play is concerned, of every soul connected with the company, that there is nothing whatever left to do but to go through with it, and let the box-office decide. Which the box-office, however cruel its judgments may seem to those who suffer from them, always does, anyhow; and always will.

## VI

Behold, then, our little company — some ten of us altogether — boarding the noon train for Hartford, Connecticut, for a final rehearsal in the theater in which we were to open our tour the following night. Here began the process of putting the final polish on our performance, preliminary to our triumphant appearance on Broadway in 'the play of the year.'

'Ruth Roger' in electric lights above Times Square seemed much nearer that day than it ever had before — or was ever to seem again. I can see that departure still; with Cecil, still lacking that fur overcoat which should have marked him out as a Napoleon of the stage, but none the less keenly conscious of the historic character of the moment, proudly and anxiously shepherding us through the train gate.

His deference to his extremely youthful leading lady was all that she could have desired; it confirmed her in her own conviction that every passing human being in Grand Central Terminal must be wondering. 'Who is that strikingly beautiful girl? Oh — it must be a theatrical troupe, and she an actress!'

That, too, was all so long ago! And I too young to have even a fleeting recollection of poor Mrs. Vail in her open barouche in the streets of Hoboken. Nor would it, if I had remembered her, have touched my complacent delight in queening it in my turn. She had been a failure; but I — I would of course be a success! So I in turn spread out all my own airs and graces; which in turn completely escaped the attention of the busy throng they were to conquer. And by this time the years have

almost healed the heartbreak that came afterward. Almost.

Even the fact that we couldn't afford the chair-car, and had to ride in the day-coach, was unimportant. It was, in fact, only the third train journey of my life; and so provided an additional thrill. Then came the bustle and excitement of arrival in a new and strange city; the ride through the streets to the hotel and thence to the theater; and the bliss of entering, alone, the 'star's dressing-room' (bare brick walls, board dressing-table, and naked electric light bulb dangling crazily before the mirror on a wire). And presently Cecil's deferential knock on the door, and the quite indescribable sensation of seeing my stage name in print for the first time, in the Hartford evening papers.

It may be hard for anybody in Hollywood to believe it, but at this time Cecil De Mille was his own advance man and press-agent — in fact the entire staff of 'Cecil B. De Mille Productions, Inc.' He had concocted and sent around to all three Hartford papers an 'interview' with 'Miss Ruth Roger, now appearing in *Baxter's Partner*, which is playing at the Heublein this week'; and, wonder of wonders, the Hartford papers had printed it.

And then — the long-hoped-for opening night; the curtain rose — and we looked out on rows upon rows of empty seats.

I learned then, to the very pit of my stomach, what had been behind that strained and haunted look in poor Mrs. Vail's eyes.

Perhaps it wasn't entirely the fault of our play. Of course there is no denying now that *Baxter's Partner* was wretched stuff. A really good play could perhaps have found at least bare sustenance in what little was left,

in December, 1910, of America's provincial theater-going public. Certainly it wasn't until several years later that 'the road' was generally and definitively pronounced dead — slain by the movies.

But then again, perhaps ten or even five years earlier even as poor a play as ours might still have found enough theater-hungry and uncritical folk to yield us a livelihood for a season. But at the time we did try it, and with the instrument we had, from that first night our case was completely hopeless.

And of course even the first night wasn't the worst of it. In the theater you can't just take your beating, get it over with and start fresh on the search for a new and better chance, next day. We had ahead of us the ghastly ordeal of struggling on through the engagements already booked. Cecil had rented the theaters; it would actually be less ruinous to him to keep on playing in them, as long as we took in railroad fare to the next town, than to quit then and there. And besides, we were all, of course, afflicted with that incurable and wasting disease, the occupational ailment of the old-time trouper, at once his chief blessing and his greatest curse — a malady known as hope. We just couldn't believe we were really as bad as all those empty seats coldly asserted us to be.

We had to admit we were a 'flop' in Hartford; but not because we were a green and inexperienced company in an appallingly inept play. Oh no! everybody at once remembered that Hartford was notoriously a theatrical graveyard. We dug up out of memory — or imagination — story after story of other plays that had failed in Hartford and then gone on to Broadway triumphs. Bridgeport, now; Bridgeport was going to be different.

It was. It was vastly worse. But do you think that

convinced us? Then you don't know theatrical human nature. We had merely made a second mistake in our choice of towns. It was Springfield that was to be our salvation. Our week in Springfield was an unrelieved disaster; that only meant that we must wait until we reached North Adams for our true worth to be recognized.

And all the time the plain fact was that each successive engagement was worse than the one before. I suppose word went on ahead of us from town to town that the year's worst play was coming and for everybody to make for the hills.

Then we ran into Christmas Week. Shall I ever forget that Christmas Eve in North Adams, Massachusetts? The turkey dinner served us by the proprietor of the little hotel (we being the only people in the dining-room) and the performance that night (when we only missed by about six persons being the only people in the theater.)

## VII

We hadn't the good luck, either, to have a Sam Hardy among us. And I had my own personal burden of woe to add to that common to us all, because of course I felt convinced that it was in some way all my fault. (Cecil didn't make any particular attempt, either, to disabuse me of that idea. Poor fellow, he probably was too deeply engrossed in his own troubles even to notice mine. At any rate, those little touches that had reminded me that I was not only 'leading lady,' but 'under his personal management' dropped out one by one.)

With them, I'm at least glad to say, my own 'leading lady' airs and graces early went overboard. I became

'just another little girl trying to get along,' and as such joined my companions in disaster, the other members of the company, in efforts to extract what amusement we could from our plight. And I fear me our frivolity completed poor Cecil's disillusionment with the rising young star his brother Billy had wished on him.

It was in Pittsfield, just after New Year's, that the struggle finally came to its inevitable end. A curt, formal notice was posted on the bulletin board, announcing that the play was to be withdrawn and entirely rewritten before its New York production; and that consequently all contracts were hereby terminated.

That in itself was not so bad; we had all expected it, we weren't particularly perturbed at the termination of contracts under which, for weeks, we hadn't drawn any salaries anyway, and Cecil was able to furnish us all with railroad tickets back to New York. The thing that hurt, in my case, was that I too got no more than that formal notice! If he had only remembered that I was 'under his personal management,' and had told me the bad news at first hand, a little before the others!

Of course I know now that his own disappointment and unhappiness had been too great. He did try valiantly, once we were back in New York, and I had reported at his office once more, to restore the old relationship; but we just couldn't manage it. We discussed, vaguely, the possibilities of whipping the play into shape for another tryout, this time in Washington; but the old enthusiasm, the old mutual confidence, had been among the irredeemable casualties of that New England tour.

Meantime I was beginning reluctantly to realize that, for the first time since I had left the American Tobacco



A WOULD-BE PRODUCER: CECIL B. DE MILLE  
At the time he was managing 'Ruth Roger'





Company's billing machines behind me, I had a problem in economics to solve. I was no longer the chief support of our home; my few remaining savings-bank dollars were steadily dribbling away. I swallowed what little was left of my pride and sought — and found — work as a model, posing for Henry Hutt and Penhyrn Stanlaws, James Montgomery Flagg, and the other popular illustrators of the day; but that only postponed the catastrophe.

One day in early spring Cecil and I had what proved to be our last luncheon together. Each of us, unluckily, came to that luncheon with definite news for the other; and more unluckily still, it was Cecil who got his budget opened first.

His news was so good that in the telling he got back — almost — to the old footing on which he had once poured out all his hopes and enthusiasms to the girl he was going to make a star. He had just sold a new play on which he had been working (at a time when I had blissfully supposed his attention still to be concentrated upon *my* career!) to David Belasco, for the colossal sum of fifteen hundred dollars. And this would enable him to go to Maine for the summer and take a long and much-needed rest before returning — *this* time, certainly, to bring Broadway to his feet!

I'd like to think that even for one fleeting instant I shared his pride and happiness; but I'm afraid it won't do. Because my own news was that my money was all gone, and that I must have some kind of job, and mighty soon. And like the child I still was, I blurted out: 'But what am *I* going to do?'

Of course, that 'tore it' — tore it once and for all. At the time and for long afterwards I naturally blamed

Cecil. I don't any more. But there isn't much point in dwelling on the final moments of that extremely painful farewell luncheon. Still, a footnote may be added; I don't think Cecil himself will mind it, now.

He came back to Broadway that fall, as he had planned; but he came back already committed to Jesse Lasky to go West — to a then new and unheard-of place called Hollywood, where he was to take charge of a motion-picture venture; and to realize dreams far more incredible than those he and I had speculated in. But before he left, as a final gesture, and one with which I can't help but sympathize, toward his brief career as a producer on the 'legitimate' stage (what an arrogant word that 'legitimate' is!), he employed some of his new resources to stage a New York production of *Baxter's Partner*.

His leading lady on this occasion, it is scarcely necessary to explain, was *not* the one he had originally chosen for the rôle of Baxter's bride. Who actually did play, on Broadway, the part I had so confidently expected to play there, I don't even remember now. But you may be sure that I was 'out front' upon that opening night!

I had fully expected it, though, to be a painful experience. It turned out to be exactly the reverse. For from the perspective of a new and entirely different career — one in which in six months I had won far more satisfying laurels than the stage had yielded me — I wasn't five minutes, once the curtain rose, in seeing how lucky I was to be on this instead of that side of the footlights.

I won't deny that I brought certain revengeful sentiments with me to that theater. But they soon fled before the pure and cleansing waves of joy and gratitude as the utter awfulness of that play from which I had escaped

was creakingly unfolded before my wondering eyes. It wasn't long before I was giggling hysterically at each new bit of bombast which, when Ruth Roger had mouthed it, I had thought to be authentic art.

For my escort, however, it was an evening of pure suffering. He was dear old Louis De Foe, dramatic critic of the *World*; and each of my giggles he matched with a heartfelt groan. He took his own ample revenge next morning, as did his colleagues on the other papers. *Baxter's Partner* as a New York production played 'one consecutive week.'

On the whole it seems to me that both its author and I, looking back from the perspective of a quarter-century, should by now be willing to consider bygones bygones; and ourselves well out of it.

# 4

## DOWN TO EARTH

### I

THIS doesn't mean that when my stage career exploded (rather like a wet paper bag, but not so loud) so squarely in my face, I didn't have, for a little while, rather a bad time of it.

I sat at home, as I remember, for about three days, without even the heart to go out posing any more. Suppose I decided, in spite of everything, to stick to my determination to be an actress, what was there for me to do? Perhaps if I had not so far completely dodged the soul-grinding business of calling at all the agencies and producers' offices, which is usually the sole recourse of a player 'at liberty,' I wouldn't at this critical point have dreaded it as much as I found I did.

Anyone who likes may say, 'you were no real trouper at heart.' Perhaps it wasn't the stage, as such, after all, for which I had been blindly reaching; perhaps it was only the glamor and mystery of life, seen first, by a girl at a billing machine, as hovering above the old Waldorf news-stand, and then, as that radiance faded on closer acquaintance, irradiating the unknown world of the stage, only to be again destroyed.

Whatever it was, somehow I found, in those three or four bitter days, that my stage career was over; and over, first of all, not just because I did not know where to turn to continue it, but because it was over inside me; and there was no use going on.

Meantime here I was, with not only my own bread and butter to think about, but my obligation — felt all the more keenly since for several years I had been the most lavish and spectacular contributor of us three — to provide my full share toward my mother's support.

Back I went, searching, over my crazy-quilt of a past. I would hardly have to return to the billing-machine; I might have found a job again behind a news-stand, but not until everything else had first been tried. Still, among the acquaintances I had made there, I might find a helpful lead.

It took less than ten seconds to pass in review, and reject, the entire array of multi-millionaires who used, in fatuous and feeble flight from boredom, to hang about my stand each evening. I had no desire to witness their pitiful squirmings if I had appealed to any of them for so much as a file-clerk's job. But — wait a minute! — there was one man at the Plaza who had been decidedly different.

Every morning he had been my earliest customer; but unlike all the others, he had never snatched his paper in such haste that he forgot to be courteous. He had never once, to my knowledge, loafed in the lobby in the evening; but he had always, whenever and wherever he appeared in the hotel, been soft-voiced and gentlemanly; indeed, he had been continually extolled by the entire hotel staff for his unvarying kindness and consideration toward even the humblest scrubwoman.

His name was Charles Chapin; and somebody had

told me once that he was city editor of the *Evening World* — whatever a city editor might be.

Next day I set out for Park Row.

Once, very long ago, as one (and the littlest one) of three little girls in pigtails, holding on very tight to my father's stalwart finger, I had been taken on a sightseeing tour to City Hall Park and Brooklyn Bridge; and my father had pointed out to us, very impressively, the street where all the great newspapers were published — the *World*, the *Sun*, and the *Tribune* in a row; the *Press* just around a corner; the *American* and the *Journal* on the other side of the bridge.

But this was the first time since that I had so much as journeyed below Fourteenth Street; and a strange, rather dull and dingy place it seemed to me.

None the less I found my way to the still dingier, gloomy little anteroom of the *World's* twelfth story editorial offices. And presently Mr. Chapin, exactly as I remembered him — squarely built, white-haired, soft-voiced, and gently smiling, yet always with that air of giving but the smallest part of his attention to the immediate moment — emerged from the oak-and-glass door marked 'EVENING WORLD.'

He invited me to sit down with him at the battered old round oaken table, under the cold, unshaded electric light, and listened in complete silence and polite, abstracted patience, to my recital of the Odyssey of my stage career. But I was not conscious of any lack of sympathy.

I knew nothing whatever either of newspapers or of newspaper men. But if one had come to me and told me the exact and literal truth about the man to whom I was talking, it would have seemed to me, not merely incredible, but too preposterous to be worthy even of laughter.

My informant would have told me, if he could even have persuaded me to listen beyond the first few words, that I was appealing for help to the one man in America who was believed by all who, they thought, knew him best, to be utterly without bowels of compassion or the faintest trace of any normal human feeling.

He was the most famous and the most bitterly hated city editor in the newspaper industry; capable — this man to whom I was pouring out my own anxiety and humiliation — of deliberately waiting to discharge a man until he could do it on Christmas Eve; and in another case, of firing a reporter as soon as he had learned the man's wife was expecting a baby.

And if my informant had been endowed with prescience, as a mythical informant might be, he could also have informed me that this calm and slightly smiling white-haired man was to die in Sing Sing Prison, a convicted wife-murderer.

But those are things which we have the great good fortune never to know beforehand; and the possibly still greater good fortune not to be compelled to explain. So I do not have to account for the simple fact that from first to last this man, of whose harshness and almost insane cruelty stories are told even yet in newspaper city rooms — was a kind, ungrudging, and helpful friend to me.

He heard me through, this first day, to my final plea for a job as a file-clerk or telephone operator — anything to carry me at least through the summer — then rose, and without a word said, beckoned me to follow him through a door, a different door than that through which he had come, and down a long, dark corridor.

We came out into a big, bare, and grimy office in which



the only furniture seemed to be a vast number of haphazard rows of battered flat-top desks, and crossed the naked concrete floor to a single roll-top desk in the far corner, at which, with his back to the one bright window in the room (it looked out over City Hall Park) sat a sharp-featured but pleasant-faced young man.

'Give this young lady a job,' said my conductor abruptly to him. 'She'd probably last a week with me on the *Evening*, and she may last two weeks with you.'

And without another word beyond that ungracious speech, he turned and walked back down the long room, disappearing through still another door from beyond which came the clicking of telegraph instruments.

## II

As I gazed helplessly after him, the young man politely inquired my name, wrote it down in a little notebook on his desk, and then introduced himself as Sherman Morse, city editor of the *World* — *the World*, he emphasized, which I was later to learn meant the morning paper, whose workers never forgot that it had a far longer and prouder history than its evening congener.

That, Mr. Morse explained, was just Mr. Chapin's way, and I mustn't mind it. All he had meant by it was that he wanted Mr. Morse to give me a chance as a reporter. Had I had any experience? No? Well, of course I understood what a reporter's work was like?

When I shook my head, a little despairingly, to this, there was a rather awkward pause. Mr. Morse tapped his chin with his pencil, and seemed about to say something that he wasn't going to like to say. Then his eyes

traveled over my shoulder in such definite fashion that I turned and met, face to face, two approaching young women.

'Mr. Chapin asked us to come in,' said the first, briskly. 'I suppose this is the new girl? . . . I'm Nixola Greeley-Smith, and this is Marguerite Mooers Marshall. We're both special writers on the *Evening World*, and Mr. Chapin suggested that since you haven't ever had any experience in newspaper work, we might explain things to you a little.'

'That's fine,' said Mr. Morse, plainly immensely relieved. 'Let me assign you your desk, and then Miss Smith and Miss Marshall can sit down and talk with you. After that I suggest you spend a day or two sort of getting acquainted with things, and by that time I'll have some assignments for you.'

My curiosity about my two instructors ran far ahead of my interest, just then, in the mysterious job which, it seemed, had in this highly casual manner been bestowed upon me. I had known, of course, vaguely, that there were women who wrote for the newspapers. I had known business girls in all their gradations, news-stand girls and actresses; but this was something new and strange. If I had thought of newspaper women at all, I would probably have classed them, hazily, as 'authors' — like Laura Jean Libbey and Bertha M. Clay. Now here I was, not only meeting two of them face to face, but, it seemed, myself about to become one of them. What would I be expected to do, I wondered — write advice to young girls? 'Beware of handsome dark young men who aspire to write plays and produce them.'

Miss Smith ('Nixie' to all who loved her, which meant, I think, all who knew her for five minutes or more) did

practically all the talking. She chattered fast and vivaciously, with constant quick, nervous movements of her hands. She was short, plump, with jet-black curls, and extremely pretty — almost as pretty, I thought, as she was untidy.

(I was told once, long afterward, that Irvin S. Cobb, who was then a 'rewrite man' on the *Evening World*, had remarked after meeting me, a few days later than this, 'the *World* has managed somehow to hire a girl that actually looks as though she washed behind her ears.')

The taller Marguerite Mooers Marshall, then as always seemed hardly to be with us at all, or to be giving more than the inescapable minimum of her attention to any matters other than those her remote and somber gaze was contemplating, in that very different world which she was condemned to inhabit evermore — a world in which, to judge from those brown eyes which sought always for something just beyond you, some lurking horror must be firmly held at bay.

Nixie Smith talked on in what to me was merely a jumble of unknown words, about 'assignments,' 'editions,' 'rewrite,' the 'copy desk,' 'human interest,' and many more; but it was Miss Marshall who said, just as both finally stood up to go, the only thing I remembered vividly.

'Never ask questions of an editor,' was her last, and almost her first, word to me. 'The one thing they want is never to be bothered. If you don't know what to do, come in and ask Nixie or me; if neither of us is around, make some kind of stab at it; but whatever an editor tells you to do, do it without asking him how.'

For three days after that I sat, alone and seemingly

forgotten of all, in a room full of men who paid no attention whatsoever to me. I had learned the further extremely important fact that, thanks to Mr. Chapin's intercession, my salary was to be twenty dollars a week. I had also learned that Thursday was pay-day, and the cashier's office on the ground floor at the rear.

I had been told to come to work every morning at eleven, and that unless I had an evening assignment (whatever that might turn out to mean) I might go home at six. I secured a copy of 'my paper' every morning, and read it religiously; but how I was to assist in its manufacture was still a mystery to me.

The following morning when I came in, as bid, a little before eleven, I found the office all but deserted. Mr. Morse and his assistant, at their desks by the window, did not deign to notice my existence; but Alec Schlosser, the head office-boy (dear old Alec, guide, philosopher, and friend to how many generations of *World* cubs!) gave me a smile and a 'Good morning.' One or two other men were busy at other roll-top desks ranged sidelong against the south wall, under the high windows which looked out on narrow, noisy, and ugly Frankfort Street.

Nearly all of the great central space of the room was taken up by what I now knew were reporters' desks. My own was in the first row, nearest the city editor and facing toward him. Directly opposite me sat a man who in rapid succession was spreading out, on an inclined board in front of him, one newspaper after another, which he leafed through, marked in some cryptic manner with a huge lead pencil, and turned over to one of the office-boys; once in a while he would pause and with a pair of shears swiftly snip out some item and turn it over to Alec Schlosser; on still rarer occasions he would him-

self get up and give the clipping to the city editor, accompanying it with a muttered word or two of explanation.

There were something like three double rows of reporters' desks, nearly all alike; all battered, all with drop-heads under which in most cases, as I discovered by investigating my own, were incredibly ancient Remington typewriters — the kind in which the writing was down underneath, and you had to lift up the carriage to see what you had written.

(It was a queer sight to me, at first, to see a row of men, each busily pecking away with their forefingers; then — often with one simultaneous impulse — lifting the carriage to peer long and anxiously at what they had just written; then lowering it and resuming their awkward pecking.)

The desks were merely shoved together to form the rows and the aisles between. They were ranged at right angles to the length of the room, leaving a clear space by way of main aisle on the north side, between the end desks and a row of dark green iron lockers which stood against the partition, behind which ran the long, dark narrow corridor leading from the anteroom. The pairs of desks in each row were jammed tight against and facing each other; but they had been shoved into place so carelessly that corners protruded here and there, from which I got many a painful bruise before I learned instinctively to avoid them.

Beyond the third row of reporters' desks, well back toward the rear of the room, was another row like it, except that these desks had plain flat tops with no drop-heads. This, I was to learn, was the 'copy desk,' and the roll-top at its inner end, against the Frankfort

Street wall, was the night city editor's throne. On the far side of the copy desk, standing in solitary majesty in the middle of the floor, was a very large double flat-topped desk in much better condition than any of the others — the night desk of the managing editor. Still further, at the very end of the room, was another group of desks belonging to the Sports Department; then, behind a seven-foot wood-panel and ground-glass partition, the telegraph room, and on the other side of that the city room of the *Evening World*.

Such was the city room of what in that year 1911, as for many years before, and for a very few years thereafter, was the most famous and most powerful newspaper in New York, and probably in all America — Joseph Pulitzer's *World*. It was this room which for a number of years was, in every real sense, more my home than any other room I have ever entered in my life; a room whose every detail is vividly clear to me even now, and for that very reason a room which I think I could not bear to look on, ever again.

### III

But on that first day it was not the room which interested me, but the people with whom I shared it. For two hours I sat there, puzzled and wondering at what seemed the empty silence of stagnation. When would the business of producing a newspaper commence?

A little before one o'clock one or two young men, with an alert and at the same time a rather self-assured manner, came sauntering in, nodded to the city editor, said 'Hello' to Alec and the man who was reading

newspapers, and sat down at their desks. Almost on their heels came two or three more; then more; before I realized it, more than a score of men were scattered about the room, sitting in groups at, or upon, the desks, with their hats on the back of their heads, smoking, chatting, and laughing.

They were almost a bit too oblivious of me, I thought, as I studied them covertly. Nothing that I saw filled me with alarm, however. I had come a considerable way since the timorous diffidence of my Florodora Tag Company days; and had, in fact, become convinced that if you bore one or two simple principles in mind, boys were quite ridiculously easy to manage. Nearly all of these new associates I mentally catalogued as 'boys'; there were, to be sure, one or two middle-aged men among them, but all the rest were plainly under thirty, and most of them under twenty-five. I did not for one moment believe that this total unawareness of my existence would continue for any disagreeably long period; in fact I found myself looking forward with considerable interest to whatever might be the future developments.

But I did not know then that I was looking upon those who would be, in a way no actual blood tie could ever have made closer, my brothers.

And as they chatted and smoked, one after another would be quietly summoned to the city editor's desk, would stand listening for a moment or two to low-voiced instructions, and then would nod his head and go out. In not more than half an hour the room was again almost empty, and I still sitting there.

The long, dull afternoon wore away, broken by a few quiet comings and goings, and occasional telephone calls and low-voiced answers. Some time after five o'clock

the men, who I knew now must be the reporters, began to drift back in again. But this time each went straight to Mr. Morse, and after a brief colloquy hurried to his own desk, brought up his typewriter and began to write; and then, a little later, to shatter what little was left by this time of the silence with yells:

‘Copy bo-o-o-oy! Ooooh, copy!’

Still wondering, and growing steadily more eager to find my own way into newspaper work’s fascinating mysteries, I sat mouse-like in my place, slyly watching the good-looking young man at my very side as he alternately pecked and peered at his work, until Alec leaned toward me to inform me I might go home.

Next day it was exactly the same; and so likewise did the third day begin. But it was not destined so to continue. All unaware to myself, I had been gradually acquiring, from combined curiosity and anxiety and sheer surplus energy, a head of steam of which I myself was quite unconscious; until pure chance provided an unexpected outlet.

Quite early on that third afternoon one of the younger men whom I had already noticed — because he was perhaps the best-looking and best-dressed of all of them — came hurrying back into the office and up to Mr. Morse’s desk, where he bent over and engaged in a long, rapid, and, to judge from what I could distinguish of their tones, an increasingly acrimonious conversation.

Presently, indeed, the dispute grew so hot that the reporter straightened up and began to speak so loudly that I, sitting a dozen feet away, could hear every word.

‘I tell you, I can’t even find her,’ he was saying angrily. ‘Ever since old man Pierce let out this blast about annulling his son’s marriage to her, Betty Faulkner has



disappeared off the face of the earth. Nobody knows where she is but her lawyer, and he won't tell.' And with that — my safety-valves lifted.

'Say, listen, Mr. Morse, if you want Betty Faulkner, I can find her for you,' I suddenly overheard myself proclaiming; and at the same time, to my own complete surprise and faint inner consternation, observed myself, as though moved by some other volition than my own, rising and encircling the row of desks, and heading straight toward the two arguing men.

#### IV

I feel greater qualms now in recalling that moment than, I am afraid, I really felt at the time. It had not, in fact, occurred to either Nixie Smith or Marguerite Mooers Marshall that it might be necessary to tell me that cub reporters do not approach the city desk unless summoned, nor address the city editor until spoken to. Indeed, I don't remember that they had even told me that what I had become was commonly called a cub reporter.

Perhaps even if they had it would have made no difference. Many of my own actions in those days were as much of a surprise to me as to anybody else; and I had not yet learned to notice any occasional slight lack of encouragement on the part of my elders.

Possibly, on this particular occasion, the immediate and total silence which followed my opening remark was not intentionally discouraging; it may have been no more than sheer stupefaction. At any rate, I can still see the manner in which both men remained, smitten

immovable, their mouths still partly open, as I bore down upon them. I have since wondered a little that they refrained from killing me; but probably, in the general paralysis of all their faculties, that obvious solution simply did not occur to them in time.

'I know Betty Faulkner,' I proclaimed, arriving at the desk. 'And one of her closest friends is a great pal of mine. What did you want to see her about?'

The silence continued so long that I looked, puzzled, from one man to the other. Finally, with a long sigh, the city editor sat down — rather as though his legs had found difficulty in sustaining him further.

'Charley,' he said in soft and gentle tones, 'this young lady is a new member of the city staff.' And with all due ceremony, he presented Charley Hand to me. 'Perhaps you had better just sit down and tell her what's wanted, and let her see what she can do.' Which Charley thereupon, with the utmost courtesy, proceeded to do; though I wondered why his eyes danced so while he did it.

The queer thing — the almost miraculous thing, as I know now after much experience with cub reporters, in the eyes both of Charley Hand and the city editor — is that after Charley had carefully and fully explained just what I was to do, I actually went forthwith and carried out my instructions with exactitude, and resulting complete success.

I did find Betty Faulkner, temporary daughter-in-law of the Waters-Pierce Oil Company millions; I did ask her all the questions I had been told to ask — precisely those and no others — and carefully remembered her replies. (Some of them, however, dealing with the more intimate details of her brief married life, even I realized would prove a trifle too picturesque for repetition, let

alone publication; at least in those still comparatively decorous days.) And I brought back with me, as I was bid, her photograph; the only one she had available. This, though I did not know it, gave the *World* not only a 'news beat' but a 'picture beat.'

Not knowing quite what next was expected of me, I did, for once, precisely what I should have done; went directly to Mr. Morse, told him my story, and gave him the photograph.

'Write it,' said he, and at once gave his entire attention to other matters.

I opened my mouth — and closed it again. What was it that Marguerite Mooers Marshall had said? 'Whatever an editor tells you to do, do it without asking him how.'

I meekly returned to my desk; opened it as I had seen the men around me do — and sat gazing helplessly at my typewriter.

'Well, what luck?' said a friendly voice in my ear; and Charley Hand was draping his long frame across the adjoining desk at an angle nicely calculated to give his amiable grin full value without seeming to assume undue familiarity. And at once an instinct far older, swifter, and surer than any process of conscious thought made beautifully clear a way of escape for me.

Within perhaps thirty seconds (long enough for a single quiver of the lip to have its due effect) the unsuspecting youth had taken my place at the typewriter, and, beaming fatuously, was laboring furiously to translate my tumultuous verbal recital into good newspaper English.

That, of course, was all too easy a solution. True honor is due to Charley that after that first rescue he refused

to repeat it, but instead spent five times as much time and energy in teaching me how to write my own stories for myself.

But that gets ahead of the story. It was not until next day that the true nature and value of my achievement was brought home to me. The moment I came into the office I was conscious of the change in my status. There were nods and smiles and pleasant 'Good mornings' from nearly all the men who had so sedulously ignored me theretofore; and the moment Charley Hand appeared he hurried over to tell me jubilantly that I had 'beaten the town.'

But all newspaper triumphs are fleeting; and this one endured but a day. That afternoon I was given a typewritten slip which, though I didn't know it, came from our City Hall reporter; and which carried the bare information that a Miss Damrosch and some man whose very name I can't now recall had secured a marriage license.

Johnny Gavin, our assistant city editor (queer to think of him as Judge Gavin of the New Jersey Probate Court!), had beamed on me as he handed me the slip, as Johnny always did; and had said, 'Nice story you had this morning'; but he hadn't explained what I was to do this time.

I was able to deduce that this was another assignment; and by a further mental effort to reach the conclusion that what was probably wanted was news of the wedding plans. But how to go about getting them, I hadn't the faintest notion.

I remembered some more advice. 'Always work the telephone as much as you can,' Nixie Smith had said. I went into one of the six booths that stood across the office

from the city desk, and began stubbornly, persistently calling up every Damrosch listed in the book, asking each one if he had a daughter who was planning to get married.

The first, I remember, was a butcher; the second a ladies' tailor; neither of them could even talk intelligible English. At the end of about an hour and a half, exhausted and deafened, I staggered out, and reported to Johnny that I hadn't been able to locate Miss Damrosch. He accepted the report without comment. But when I came in the following morning, Mr. Morse was waiting for me.

Displayed upon his desk were six newspaper clippings — from the *Times*, *Tribune*, *Sun*, *American*, *Herald*, and *Press* — and each and every one of them told the same story. They were all about the forthcoming wedding of the daughter of Walter Damrosch, the musician. The *World* had not a line.

In silence, I looked helplessly over them; in silence and with no sympathy, Mr. Morse watched me. Then he spoke, quietly.

'On the *World* we let this sort of thing happen, *once*,' said he. He needed to say no more. I returned to my desk in a totally crushed condition.

## V

For several days no chance was offered me to redeem myself. It was a bad time. Once more, and more forlornly by far, I sat for hours and watched everybody else receive assignments. If somebody had offered me my old job at the Florodora coupon wicket I believe I would have taken it.

Charley Hand, when he was in the office, proffered comradely consolation and sage counsel; it was during this time, in fact, that he began my systematic instruction in newspaper routine. He explained the workings of the assignment sheet and a few other things that had mystified me, such as the difference between the copy-basket and the spike; and began his one-pupil class in newspaper writing. One or two of the other younger men, too, began a bit of timid acquaintance-scraping; but all that helped only a little in this collapse of my new career.

You may believe, therefore, that when at last I again received the call, I answered it in a state of determination amounting to incipient detonation. Which was fortunate; because the story, though I didn't know it, was a far less easy one than that on which I had failed so ignominiously.

Miss Pauline Frederick, an actress of no small beauty and fame, had recently become, in private life, Mrs. Frank C. Andrews. Her husband was a prominent and wealthy architect and builder whose specialty was the erection of hotels. But a tip had come in from sources which the *World* fondly believed to be exclusively its own, that Miss Frederick had leased, in her own name, an apartment at some distance from the hotel in which she and her husband were supposed to be residing. Had a rift appeared so soon in the hymeneal lute? It was to be my duty to find out; and to find out, if I could, before any other newspaper secured the hint.

The moment I entered the foyer of the hotel, to which I had decided to go first in search of Mr. Andrews, it was plain that Mr. Morse's belief that our information was exclusive was a vain illusion. The lobby before the

elevators was jammed with reporters and cameramen from every paper in town.

Not knowing what else to do, I joined them; and as we waited, we gossiped. This was my first encounter with any other practitioners of my new craft outside my own *World* confrères, and I was at the same time immensely curious about them, and anxious not to let my own greenness betray itself. Almost immediately I had my first experience of one phenomenon I was many times, in similar circumstances, to observe and use.

In any group of five or more newspaper reporters, there is almost certain to be one of a peculiar and rather pathetic type — a naïve squirrel of a man who expends a vast amount of energy in picking up all manner of entirely trivial and usually irrelevant detail surrounding the real story, and in proudly relaying it all to his fellows; I suppose by way of impressing them with his superior alertness. There was one of these in the group I joined, and at the moment his prize exhibit was the fact that a big black limousine with a chauffeur, which he showed us waiting in front of the side entrance of the hotel, was Mr. Andrews's car.

He had just informed me of this when the elevator doors opened. There was a concerted rush for a handsome, well-dressed man who had tried to slip unobtrusively out by that same side entrance. He made his way courteously but firmly through the crowd.

'Not a word, boys; not a word. I'm sorry; nothing to say,' he kept repeating as he hurried out; until, leaving them on the sidewalk, still protesting vainly, he jumped into the car at the curb and slammed the door behind him. The chauffeur must have already had his orders, for he started instantly.

This, however, proved less conclusive than it had been meant to be; because the chauffeur did not know that his employer was staring helplessly into the face of a young woman who, at the precise moment he himself had jumped in, had opened the opposite door and jumped in too; also slamming the door behind her.

The car went over a bump; Mr. Andrews and I sat down abruptly, side by side.

I giggled.

He tried hard — and vainly — to look angry.

'I am from the *World*, Mr. Andrews,' said I sweetly.

It was a conclusive demonstration of the triumphant power — given favorable circumstances, of course — of sheer impudence. He permitted me to ride all the way to his office with him; and before we had gone ten blocks he was unburdening himself of his marital griefs, to a completely strange young woman reporter, to an extent it might have been permissible in him to do to his own mother. I had only to sit quietly and interject an occasional sympathetic and encouraging murmur. The result was a really superb and unpremeditated monologue on the topic; how it feels to be the husband of a celebrity. One did not gather that he had found the position an agreeable one.

From the warmth of his farewell, as he assisted me to alight in front of his office door, I think he was genuinely grateful to me — at and for the moment — for giving him the opportunity to find relief in speech. A great many worthy folk, I fear, have experienced this sense of warm friendliness to a sympathetic and understanding newspaper reporter. Unfortunately, it seldom persists after they have read the papers next day. But no understanding reporter blames them overmuch for that.



My assignment, however, at this stage was but half finished; and no one this time had to tell me what to do next.

No reporter had so far been permitted so much as to profane the doormat of Miss Frederick's new apartment; I wasted no time in trying that approach. I was beginning to grasp the true use of the telephone in news-gathering.

'Miss Frederick,' was my opening remark, 'Mr. Andrews has just been telling me' — and I breathed into her ear a judicious selection of the remarks which I still had fresh in memory. One point on which, I recall, he had dwelt, was his bride's hot temper; I was afforded an immediate demonstration that he had done it no injustice. All other reporters might have been refused admittance, but this was different. I was not merely admitted; I was eagerly awaited — in fact the lady began talking before I was halfway through the door.

And when my two interviews, both completely and utterly exclusive to the *World*, appeared next morning — displayed in parallel columns, with my two victims' pictures at the top, side by side — any lingering qualms of conscience I might have felt were completely extinguished by the greeting I received at the office.

It seemed to be universally conceded that the cub had made good.

# 5

## A MASTER ROGUE

### I

THERE never was a paper quite like Joseph Pulitzer's *World*; and of course, there never will be one even remotely like it again. It hadn't the literary brilliance of the urbane and cynical *Sun*; it was crude at times, and Frank Andrews and Pauline Frederick were far from being the only people whom its zealots, in their enthusiasm, quite indefensibly crucified for comparatively little fault; it was more than a little naïve in some of its crusading activities. But it was a paper that had the mysterious power of commanding a greater fervor of loyalty than I have ever seen inspired by any other human institution before or since.

We told each other that 'J. P.,' that blind wreck of a man who, from his yacht overseas, had his finger on the impelling wires to which each and every one of us responded electrically, was a tyrant and a slave-driver; and so, perhaps, he was. But it wasn't J. P. we were working for; we were working for the *World*. (And so, of course, was he; not only working but giving his life for it.) In this case, at least, it still seems right that the creature was exalted above the creator.

Toward the latter part of my first summer as a *World* reporter, my own chance came to experience the direct touch of Joseph Pulitzer, which could make itself felt more powerfully through three thousand miles of cable in the silent depths of the ocean's darkness than the direct blow of any other man's clenched fist.

The manner in which this came about, and the experience which resulted for me, I think show very clearly the essential differences between working on the old *World* and newspaper work as it seems to have become today. They also make, in their own right, a fairly exciting story.

To his dying day Joseph Pulitzer never reconciled himself to the conception of newspaper work as solely concerned with the gathering, recording, and distributing of news — that is, such of the currently revealed facts of human behavior and misbehavior as might be of inherent general interest or importance — in which moral attitudes on the newspaper's own part are out of place.

Tireless and incurable crusader that he was, the uttermost flame of his zeal was called forth by examples of the evil wrought on simple folk by what we called then the 'get-rich-quick' fraternity — an epithet that since 1929 may call for greater delicacy in application. So long as he lived, the District Attorney had, in the *World*, a volunteer ally whose enthusiasm often outran its prudence, but at least made life considerably more hazardous than it might otherwise have been for a great many peculiarly unsavory scoundrels.

One of the showiest of the scalawags who in those days lived in luxury at the expense of the unwary was a dapper gray-haired genius named Jared Flagg.

Most swindlers' pretensions to gentility are rather

less than skin-deep. But Jared Flagg really came of a distinguished family. His brother was a leading architect of his time; several other relatives, I believe, had long and honorable careers in Wall Street, and were, of course, helpless to prevent the misuse of their good name by their one black sheep. Jared himself had graduated, I believe with honors, from Yale; had traveled widely, and enjoyed at least the acquaintance of men of high position and power both in Europe and America.

You read of such men in books; but he was the only authentic specimen I ever encountered in life — an individual who really did combine the polished manners, poise, and charm of a cultured man of the world with a werewolf streak no grace could ever tame.

He first came to the *World's* attention when he secured control, in some manner, of a row of apartment-houses near the old 'Tenderloin,' which he fitted up in small furnished suites whose tenants without exception were both feminine and frail. It presently became known, in the conveniently devious ways in which such things are spread abroad in the region around Longacre Square, that among the 'modern conveniences' which 'Flagg's Flats' had to offer prospective tenants was a unique freedom from police interference.

Not long before I joined its staff the *World* published a story exposing the whole sordid and pitiful mess. There was a terrific commotion. The resulting shakeup in the Police Department went all the way up to the Commissioner; and 'Flagg's Flats' were abruptly and permanently closed.

But Jared Flagg did something for which few of his kind have the audacity; he sued the *World* for libel, demanding fifty thousand dollars in damages. And our

editors were much disconcerted to learn from their own attorneys that there was a very real danger that he would win the suit. Moral proof of the unsavory tale was not enough; they must have legal and fully evidential proof, and this they neither had nor were in any position to get. It began to look uncomfortably like a case in which they had bitten off more than they could chew.

But the best defense in such emergencies is vigorous counter-attack. So the *World* cast about for ways and means of inflicting further, and this time, if possible, irreparable damage upon the injured Jared's frail reputation. The object was to convince a jury that such a man could hardly be libeled by anything you might say about him.

Quite providentially, just at this time a former reporter who had become a publicity man for one of the big steamship lines, and who had observed the *World's* interest in Jared Flagg, came to our managing editor with a new tale of that gentleman's activities. Long afterward I heard that he had himself steered a few suckers into Jared's net, and had been aggrieved by the smallness of the commission paid him. But at the time he posed quite successfully as a man animated by pure public spirit — and a natural interest in the tipster's commission on any story that might result.

Flagg, he revealed, had opened a new bucket-shop of highly ingenious pattern. Does anybody, I wonder, remember now what a bucket-shop was?

The term strictly applied only to ostensible brokerage firms which in reality 'bucketed' trading orders — that is, instead of executing them merely played them against each other and, in effect, bet against their own

customers on all uncovered balances. The true bucket-shop was, indeed, 'legitimate' in the sense that it followed actual stock-market quotations, and relied for its profits — over and above the commissions charged for the services it only pretended to render — on the old and many-times proved theory that the sucker will be wrong far oftener than he is right.

In these establishments the minority who were right once in a while were punctually paid their full rightful winnings — which of course did them no permanent good, since it merely encouraged them to guess again, and wrongly. But such a basis of operations left the losers no ground for complaint against the bucket-shop. The term, however, gradually came to be applied also to alleged stock-trading offices in which the victim didn't even have this faint chance for his white alley.

The vigilance of the Stock Exchange, and its untiring efforts to compel the sucker to lose his money by strictly legal, open, and aboveboard means, have practically wiped out the old-fashioned bucket-shop. Twenty-five years ago, however, it was a flourishing institution, and one which, day in and day out, excited Joseph Pulitzer's rage to a greater degree, probably, than any other.

In setting up a bucket-shop, consequently, Jared had made a peculiarly impudent invasion of a field which the *World* considered under its special guardianship. Mr. Pulitzer's zeal had, in fact, resulted in building up on our city staff a group of men who were practically specialists in bucket-shop procedure from the initial 'squeal' to the final raid. The dear old paper took tremendous pride in their feats of exposure, in such cases as that of '520 per cent Miller,' and others. (What naïve and clumsy pikers they, and Jared too, would seem to us today!)

## II

But incredible as Jared Flagg himself may seem to anyone who did not know him in his proper pre-war setting, the manner in which the *World* on this occasion set out to entrap him was more wondrous still.

A possible explanation that has occurred to me is that everybody concerned was a voracious reader of E. Phillips Oppenheim, and had come to accept him as a reliable guide in all of life's problems. The plot that they contrived was at least decked out with enough signals, secret codes, and hidden rendezvous, passwords, and disguises to furnish two Oppenheim novels, and also to prove that managing editors are no more immune than anybody else to the thrills of make-believe. It was a tremendous lot of fun; though I am probably the only one concerned who was ever willing to admit as much.

As for me, not one atom of the background that I have since learned and here set down did I then know; and not one atom's worth did I care. But I can still feel the thrill that came when the managing editor called me into the innermost sanctum to inform me solemnly that I had been personally selected by Mr. Pulitzer to undertake a difficult, delicate, and possibly dangerous mission for the paper. It was enough for me to learn that I was to lure a sinister quarry into the clutches of the law; that there was magnificent play-acting involved; and that, lest the villain's suspicions be aroused, they had decided that I must work almost wholly single-handed.

So completely, indeed, did they put the whole case in my hands that I sometimes wonder still at the trustful-

ness of those supposedly hard-boiled, worldly-wise, and cynical newspaper editors.

They really knew far less about me than they did about Jared Flagg. Of course Charley Chapin had brought me in; but if they asked him about me (which I doubt) he could not have so much as told them my home address. I had come out of nowhere; had been on the staff perhaps three months, and was getting twenty dollars a week. So they sent me out alone to entrap a crook who had at least one hundred thousand dollars, and his liberty, at stake; believed implicitly, from first to last, everything I told them about him; and finally brought in the police and the United States District Attorney, raided Flagg's offices, and risked everything in an effort to put him in jail, on my unsupported word.

And, convicted on evidence seized in that raid, Jared Flagg went scot-free. Not because the girl reporter failed (or sold out, as she had twenty chances to do) but because the United States District Attorney, supposedly one of the ablest lawyers in New York, had neglected to procure a search-warrant before seizing Jared's books. So the Supreme Court of the United States felt constrained to set aside clear proof of his guilt; it had not been obtained by 'due process of law.'

Not that I cared; I was, happily, still at an age when a story needed neither moral, purpose, nor definite conclusion, provided only it supplied plenty of action and excitement. And this one had given me seven delirious weeks of play-acting; pretty clothes, mystery, suspense, and more than a hint of danger; with, above all, myself in the exact center of everything that was going on.

I doubt if Jared cared much, either. His kind have



their own philosophy, by which he was probably able to sustain with equanimity the abrupt halting of his promisingly felonious enterprise and his hopeful libel suit, by the reflection that at least his safe-deposit box was still intact and he himself out of jail.

The *World* was perhaps a trifle disappointed; but as the original raid and trial practically covered page 1, and the Supreme Court reversal was only a paragraph on page 8 or even farther back, and as nothing more was ever heard of the libel suit, it was able to content itself.

The District Attorney possibly found the reversal disconcerting. Still, he retained his post and his salary; and the final outcome was powerless to take away his raid-harvested reams of publicity. So the curtain, when it finally came down on the Flagg case, left everybody reasonably happy and nobody seriously the worse — save perhaps the taxpayers, and possibly also Flagg's 'clients'; and since these last were prevented, at least for a long while, from dumping any more of their savings in Jared's lap, it may be argued that even they came out rather better than they had any real right to expect.

But let us begin at the beginning. My rôle in the Flagg case was that of a wealthy and innocent but promisingly skittish young widow from some vague region of the far Northwest. The first act, for me, was a glorious shopping tour on which, at the *World's* expense, I outfitted myself in the smartest of half-mourning. My residence had already been chosen for me with the same loving care that went into every detail of the stage-setting for the melodrama.

It was the Hotel Seville; selected not only because it was off the beaten track of any acquaintances who

might, in one of the big hotels, have greeted me by my real name at some inconvenient moment, but also because — a fine touch there! — it was known to be favored by people from the section of my own supposed origin.

Once I was outfitted and established, it only remained for me to be put on display by our informer in a restaurant Flagg was known to frequent, and let Nature take its course. On our very first visit the great Jared, immaculate in faultless cutaway, gardenia in buttonhole, came strolling past our table. He was not the man to fail to note his sometime 'bird-dog,' of whose disaffection he had as yet no suspicion, lunching with a blue-eyed and fluffy blonde of tender years, dressed in mourning but not, apparently, precisely steeped in woe.

The rest was so absurdly easy that in the back of my mind, for a while, wavered a panicky fear that the Master Mind of crookdom had either known all about me beforehand or seen through me at once, and was playing cat-and-mouse with me for some dark purposes of his own. But the fatuousness of his behavior gradually reassured me. I had, as you may have perhaps already gathered, had some small experience with slightly elderly 'irresistibles,' and Jared Flagg's manner conformed to a pattern all too familiar.

### III

On this first day he dawdled at our table and made small talk with my escort until he practically forced that worthy to present him — despite my quite evident lack of interest — to 'Mrs. Mary Rand.' Then he sat

down with an eagerness quite pathetic in its obviousness, and began a rather naïve effort to draw from me, in the face of my evident reluctance, all obtainable details as to my circumstances, my difficulties in the management of my husband's estate, and my plans for the future.

We had of course been presented as 'Mr. Flagg of Jared Flagg & Co., Mrs. Rand — one of the coming men in Wall Street'; but there was far less subtlety than I had expected in the manner in which, within fifteen minutes, he was offering his services as my financial adviser, and inviting me to visit his offices.

I promised to think his invitation over; but I didn't accept it. I was, in fact, extremely careful not to show the faintest interest in the great Mr. Flagg's existence; so it did not surprise me in the least when two days later I received a telephone call from him.

This time he had apparently learned a lesson, for he was most respectful. He had remembered that my escort had told him that I was but newly arrived in New York, and it had occurred to him that his secretary, a Miss Madeline Russe, might be of great help to me in my shopping and sight-seeing. If so, Miss Russe's services were mine to command. I permitted myself to thaw sufficiently to permit Miss Russe to call. She proved to be a girl of about my own age, a simple, friendly, and innocent soul — too innocent, indeed, for her employer's best interests.

That was the beginning of some six or seven hilarious weeks during which, in my rôle of artless visitor from the hinterland, I saw New York as the guest of Jared Flagg. Day by day his pursuit, though always most respectful, grew more ardent and more assiduous. I was his daily

guest at luncheon, at dinner, at the theater, and at supper; usually with Miss Russe also present to reassure my provincial propinities.

By the end of the first week I had permitted myself to be lured to his office to join a group of his most valued 'clients' whom it was his custom to entertain lavishly at luncheon after the close of business on Saturdays; and each day I underwent a more persistent and steadily less subtle pumping with regard to the details of my supposed fortune. But I waved all talk of money matters aside. My incurable frivolity was, I suppose, a sore trial to him. I really hadn't the faintest notion what Mr. Rand had left; I had no head for figures, and legal terms made my head ache. His attorneys said 'something over \$150,000,' depending on what the real estate would bring. Mr. Rand hadn't wanted me ever to sell; he was a great one for holding on to property.

Jared never ventured to question me directly about the city of my supposed residence, in which, presumably, was located the real estate of which my attorneys entertained such golden opinions. I did learn that he had inquired, ever so casually, at the Seville as to the place from which I had registered myself, and hadn't seemed over-pleased to learn that I had only written 'Chicago.'

The entertainment which he lavished upon the exasperatingly elusive Widow Rand differed in no notable way from that a genuine 'customers' man' might have provided in the days of the late boom, unless in its even wilder extravagances — and perhaps in the nervous instability that betrayed itself in a constant, feverish, and insanely costly shifting of the scene.

We might be in center-aisle seats in the sixth row at

the most popular play in town — seats purchased from a speculator at what for those days was an absurd premium. But let him take a notion, halfway through the second act, that my interest was lagging. Forthwith we must leave and proceed to a revue; or, if his first choice did not please him, to two successive revues.

Let us be dining at the Clermont with all the glories of the Hudson at nightfall spread before us; we might expect to be snatched away immediately after the fish course to finish our dinner at the Garden City Hotel away out on Long Island or the Woodmansten Inn in Westchester; and then to be hurried back to Delmonico's for liqueurs.

How often, after his deferential good-nights in the Seville foyer, Jared Flagg rode home cursing my flippant evasiveness, I don't know. But by the time I had finally reached the point at which it seemed advisable to begin supplying — right out of a youthfully fertile imagination — some of the details regarding my wealth for which he had been probing so long and vainly, I discovered they were no longer needed.

He had, poor man, by a natural but disastrous indulgence in precisely the type of wishful thinking which provided him with his own victims, become through his own inquiries so thoroughly convinced of that fortune's reality that, abandoning all efforts to explore the gold mine in detail, he began to concentrate whole-heartedly upon the effort to lure it into his own clutches.

The trouble was that the only method which occurred to him for accomplishing this was to dazzle me with the brilliance of his financial genius. And that, of course, could best be done by explaining his great invention to me — his infallible method of making money by doing

what he called 'operating simultaneously on both sides of the market.'

Now Nature had endowed me with blue eyes, and with a native faculty for keeping them, when needful, unclouded by even the faintest symptoms of intelligence. (Perhaps that wasn't, in my then stage of development, quite so much of a feat of pure histrionism as I complacently considered it.) And experience had taught me — although I first stumbled on the discovery by pure instinct — that excellent results were often obtainable, where a man was concerned, if at any seemingly strategic moment I were merely to open them as widely as possible. But there was no pretense about my unfathomable ignorance of all things financial; but for two things, Jared might even then have been safe enough.

His first pitfall was that he couldn't resist the temptation to show off; and his second was that, as I really think, he himself more than half believed in his own 'system.' There was a ring of sincerity in his enthusiastic explanations which I can't believe was all put on. Perhaps the starting-point of crooked actions is just sheer inability to think straight in the first place.

Hopelessly bewildered as I was by his fluent market jargon, I gradually, in my own mind, got something like this out of it all. If you sold stocks and they went up, you lost; if they went down, you won. If you bought and they went up, you won; if they went down, you lost. Then, surely, if you both bought and sold at the same time the two must cancel each other; you could neither win nor lose.

And it was just that point, hidden away under a cloud of talk about 'technical position,' 'progressive

covering,' 'counterbalanced margins,' and so on, that Jared Flagg himself, I verily believe, actually couldn't or wouldn't see. The only reason he hadn't so far made his great idea work was not the law of equilibrium; oh no! it was just the fault of some minor detail he hadn't yet quite perfected. He may even have excused himself for the deceptions he was practicing on his 'clients' by telling himself it was all done for their own good, to keep them happy until he had finally worked the thing out, when of course he would make everything all right for all of them.

So he went on with his happy, vainglorious explanations, until at last, through a careful gleaning and quiet piecing together of casual sentences here and there — perhaps no more than a single significant admission out of a whole evening's boastings — I had built up a pretty complete picture of the whole sorry business.

#### IV

Another line of approach proved almost equally helpful. As our acquaintance progressed, I began to invite Madeline Russe, whose home was in White Plains, to stay overnight with me occasionally after a late party, to save her the long trip home. And after one or two such nights, Madeline began to comfort me on my inability to grasp Mr. Flagg's financial explanations.

I mustn't mind it that I couldn't understand Mr. Flagg; nobody could. He purposely made himself complicated and mysterious. His own partners, Mr. Morgan and Mr. Neely, didn't really know what was going on. Mrs. Childs, the margin clerk, didn't know, herself,

what the orders and reports meant that she was supposed to give and receive over the phone. Besides, those orders didn't go anywhere, because there was nobody at the other end of those phones; most of them were dummies!

Then, on another night, after Jared, lured somewhat beyond prudence by considerable whiskey and champagne, had talked largely of the money he had in his safe-deposit boxes, his adoring secretary murmured sleepily that he hadn't told the half of it. She knew, because she knew Mr. Flagg kept two sets of books; one set that everybody knew about, and one set that only he could understand, and that nobody else was allowed to see; that was why there were two safes in the office.

There was rejoicing in the *World* office when I reported, by grapevine telegraph and in code, those highly suggestive statements. And presently, by the correct devious route, there was relayed to me a heavy, thick, and elaborately sealed envelope which, pursuant to the instructions that came with it, I took with me on my next visit to the offices of Jared Flagg & Co.

'I haven't the faintest idea what these papers are,' said I, beaming trustfully upon him, and speaking, for once, the exact and literal truth. 'But I was told it's terribly important that I take good care of them, and I'm getting nervous about having them in a hotel room. Could you keep them for me?'

Jared immediately became fatherly. He patted my hand, and tucked the envelope carefully away in a pigeonhole of the huge safe directly behind his desk. 'They will certainly be safe here, my dear,' said he benignly, 'for I am the only person allowed even to look



into that safe, and it is locked whenever I leave the office, if only for fifteen seconds.'

A moment ago I mentioned 'Mr. Morgan,' who was supposedly Jared's partner. He may be worth a word or two, since he represents one mystery of the Flagg case that never was cleared up. That was the real connection between Daniel N. Morgan, former Mayor of Bridgeport, Connecticut, and former Treasurer of the United States, and Jared Flagg, cleverest swindler of his comparatively primitive era.

That the connection was valuable to Jared was plain enough. Mr. Morgan had a desk of his own in the Flagg offices, and the walls displayed, in handsome frames, several Treasury notes and Government bonds of large denominations; all bearing the signature of D. N. Morgan, Treasurer. These were always called to the attention of prospective 'clients,' who then were personally presented to Mr. Morgan. But that gentleman, though allowing himself to be thus used as 'front,' was extremely careful never to speak of himself as a partner; and no evidence criminally involving him, even to the extent of indicating any payments of any kind to him by Jared, was ever unearthed.

But when we had identified, by means of the packet of supposedly valuable papers, the particular one of the two safes which must contain Flagg's private account books, the play drew near to its climax scene — the raid. And then, on its very eve, a thing happened which came nearer to saving Jared Flagg than any amount of money could have done.

It was just after noon on a Saturday, and we had gathered as usual in Flagg's offices on the eleventh floor of the Tilden Building in West Fortieth Street, waiting

for the weekly luncheon party. Jared bowed us all into the elevator and stepped in after us; the elevator boy slammed the door, turned on the power — and down went car and passengers like a plummet.

There was no time to scream. All I remember is the horrible jolting, rattling, and scraping in the sides of the shaft. Then, with a series of terrific, jarring shocks and one final sickening jolt, the car brought up, throwing us to our knees in a heap.

Then — still before even one woman had had time to bethink herself to shriek — we heard the voice of Jared Flagg, loose liver, hard drinker, and brazen swindler of all poor folk who trusted him. And his voice was calm and cheerful.

‘Thank Heaven, the dogs caught her,’ said he. ‘Now let’s see about getting out of here.’

With that, however, bedlam broke loose. We literally clawed our way to our feet; I remember that Jared himself got a long bloody scratch across one cheek — which he completely ignored — from some hysterical woman’s nails. Everybody assailed the elevator boy, demanding that he ‘do something.’ He whimpered that it was Saturday afternoon and the building was deserted; it might be hours before anybody found us.

A far sadder commentary on our plight was that it might be longer still before anybody missed us. Probably even that elevator boy was better off in that respect than most of the poor rootless waifs who were entrapped with him.

Certainly nobody would miss Jared Flagg except those who would greatly prefer not to have him ever found again. On the other hand he had himself not the slightest intention of remaining lost. There are two

sides to lone-wolfishness; and now he showed the other. He took instant and complete charge of the situation.

'We've got to crawl out ourselves, then,' said he. 'We can boost each other up through that hole.'

We all looked; and I know I caught my breath. We were jammed between the third and the fourth floors; the steel bar at the top of the car door wasn't more than eighteen inches above the fourth-floor sill. If the car started to fall again just as you were halfway through that narrow opening —

Once more Flagg's voice, cool and quietly amused, cut through the shrill babble.

'Nonsense!' said he decisively. 'Once those safety catches grip, they jam the car so tight you need hydraulic jacks to get it loose again. This car is as solid as that floor itself. Here; if you're all so timid about it, two of you boost me up.'

Next moment he had fairly compelled the two men nearest him to lift him, and had coolly poked his head and shoulders through the gap. Then, lying there on his stomach, with that guillotine-like steel bar within inches of his back, he craned his head around to smile down at us and call:

'See? Perfectly safe. And to show you, I'll stay right here until you are all out.'

And that is just what he did. What is more, he kept up a steady, even flow of reassuring talk as, one by one, we all plucked up the courage to be boosted up and to wriggle through the hole. Not until the elevator boy, like a sea-captain, last to leave his post, had scrambled up and out, did Jared calmly climb to his own feet.

## V

Within half an hour he was presiding, quite as usual, at luncheon; pressing wine upon his guests, preening himself under our open admiration, and, alas! already beginning to capitalize upon it. By the time he had begun his customary speech about the pleasure we should give him if we would bring all our friends to share in the wealth he was piling up for us, the heart of the 'Widow Rand,' which had been dangerously close to the melting-point as she watched him dangling debonairly in what had looked at the time so much like the jaws of death — was rapidly hardening once more.

It was, in fact, long a story around the *World* offices that on that same afternoon I came charging into the inner sanctum of Mr. Spurgeon, the managing editor, exploding:

'You better call the wagon for Jared Flagg before he invites Mayor Gaynor to luncheon and steals the City Hall right out from under the old boy's whiskers.'

That 'attribution' does more justice, however, to the lively and irreverent fancy of some of the office wits — Sam Fisher, perhaps, or Lindsay Dennison — than to my own serious and literal-minded devotion to my paper's cause. I did, for the first time, report at the office in person that afternoon; and after hearing my story Mr. Spurgeon agreed that it was time for the raid. The whole situation was thoroughly discussed, and I was given instructions for my own next steps.

Acting upon them, on the following Monday and Tuesday I begged off on all engagements with Jared, pleading the shock to my nerves produced by the elevator accident. Jared's own nerves would probably have

sustained a considerably greater shock had he known how I actually spent those two days — in the society of the Federal Grand Jury.

My evidence was alone amply sufficient to enable that body promptly to return true bills against Jared and his associates. Indictments were drawn and warrants procured for their arrest — but, fatally, no search-warrant.

The raid was to be made, it was decided, at noon on Saturday. At that hour, I was able to assure our General Staff, both safes would still be open, and Flagg and his entire gang would almost certainly be on hand for the customary luncheon. There was another important consideration from the *World's* point of view. With the Federal Building closing at noon and the reporters for other papers stationed there going off duty, and with the Sunday papers going to press early in the afternoon, there would be less risk than at any other possible hour during the week of leakage of the *World's* 'beat.' The authorities had of course agreed, in consideration of our generosity in handing them so spectacular a case all wrapped up and on a platter, to protect our exclusive rights to the news story.

Naturally the melodrama must have the true Oppenheim touch at its climax. Mine it was to be to give the signal when the great moment arrived; first making sure that all the men wanted were in the offices and that the safes were open, and then waving my handkerchief from the eleventh floor window. Acknowledgment was to be made from the sidewalk opposite.

That is another day I am not likely to forget. Through some minor stupidity the raiding party was twenty minutes late; and for that centuries-long interval I had

to stand at the window of Jared Flagg's private office, pretending to be almost overcome by the heat (luckily, though it was late September, the day really was unusually warm) and fanning myself vigorously with my handkerchief; all the while keeping up a constant flow of badinage intended to distract Jared's attention both from my eccentric behavior and from the fact that it was already well past the time when he usually closed and locked his confidential safe and departed to the Café Beaux-Arts.

At last, when I was beginning to curse wildly under my breath, the answering white flutter came from across the street. I strolled away from the window and wandered with carefully calculated aimlessness about the office until I had reached a point just in front of the open safe. There I casually paused and through a second eternity proceeded to flirt with Jared more outrageously than ever.

A slightly hysterical note was beginning to creep into my chatter before I finally heard a smashing blow on the outer office door and the tinkle of broken glass. (They could have actually more easily opened it and quietly walked in; but your true detective on a 'big case' would never forego the fun and excitement of smashing in a door, merely because all he really had to do was turn the knob.)

Jared Flagg, too, heard that crash and knew instantly what it meant; in that moment his face turned to the face of a trapped wolf. I wonder if, subconsciously, he had not always known that some day it was coming; if he had not been waiting and listening for it from the time when, months before, he had first set up his snare. I wonder if his kind are not always,

in the bottom of their twisted souls, expecting the hand on the shoulder or the sight of blue uniforms in the doorway.

All I know is that he leaped to his feet in a flash, spun violently around and came face to face with me, eyes narrowed and glittering and teeth showing in a snarl as he lunged for the safe door to slam it to.

I had no time or need to think; I had planned beforehand what I had to do, but the sudden change in him helped vastly in making it realistic. Genuinely startled as I was, I squealed and collapsed in an artistic faint, half in and half out of the open safe — completely blocking the door — and closed my eyes with one long fluttering sigh.

## VI

Between the lashes, however, I saw three post-office inspectors; three uniformed policemen with revolvers drawn; and what looked like the entire city room of the *World*, come charging in.

I was lifted out of the safe door and tenderly 'revived,' and under Flagg's contemptuous gaze his private papers and precious confidential ledgers were hauled forth, packed in boxes, and carried down to the waiting Black Maria — in which I also, for the sake of appearances, had the pleasure of riding to the Tombs, in whose corridors I had my final earthly glimpse of Jared Flagg.

So far as I was concerned that was practically the end of the Flagg case. The District Attorney unwisely decided, after gloating over the wealth of evidence the books revealed, that he did not need me on the witness-

stand; it was in fact the *World's* policy to keep its own people out of such prominence unless it were absolutely unavoidable.

We published, of course, some acres, more or less, regarding my adventures and my notes on Jared's nefarious practices and idiosyncrasies; I was patted on the back and made much of by all my superiors; and to crown all a letter came from the yacht *Liberty*, signed in Joseph Pulitzer's own tortured scrawl, offering me his personal thanks and congratulations, and directing that I be given a bonus of one hundred dollars for my achievements. And in a week, or less, I was back on the regular run of daily assignments. But they seemed pretty tame for quite a while.

Only one more note need be set down here regarding the after-history of Jared Flagg. Upon his final release from bail by order of the Supreme Court, Jared returned to New York and resumed business at the old stand. He published and circulated at his own — that is, at his clients' — expense a pamphlet in which his release was described as a 'triumphant vindication,' and Mrs. Rand figured extensively as a 'snake in the grass.'

But by that time the World War had reduced exposures of 'confidence men,' as news, to extremely small potatoes. Even in the *World* itself Jared Flagg received scarcely two paragraphs when, raided once more and brought to the Federal Building to be arraigned, he dropped dead from heart disease in the corridor of that gloomy old structure on Park Row, a stone's throw from the offices of the newspaper that had fought him so long.



## 6

# A MASTER SLEUTH

### I

THE Flagg case, I think, perfectly typifies what most people still fondly imagine newspaper work is like — in which they are regrettably mistaken. It wasn't even as much like it in those very days as we who then made our living at it romantically believed it was. And today, of course, the romance of newspaper work survives chiefly as a tradition; but a tradition of such power that it hides the unromantic truth not only from the general public, but from most of today's newspaper workers!

The conception of newspaper work as a business of 'crusades,' 'under-cover investigations,' 'exposures,' and 'scoops' was of course part of a certain small-boy attitude of those times toward life in general, which had probably its least beautiful flowering in the Spanish-American War, and found its apotheosis and its national hero in 'Teddy' — the perfect and lovable example of the boy who simply couldn't grow up.

But it is also true that this particular notion about newspaper work owed most of its fervor to another great and incurable romantic who happened by a quaint

coincidence to be probably 'Teddy's' bitterest personal enemy — Joseph Pulitzer. And naturally that purely romantic sense of newspaper reporting as a perilous and holy mission reached its most fantastic heights in the city room of Joseph Pulitzer's own newspaper, the *World*.

There were in New York in those days, side by side, with only the narrow lane of Frankfort Street between them, two wholly different and strongly individualized newspaper traditions. That of the *Sun*, embodied in the work of dear old Frank Ward O'Malley, Ed Hill, and others, glorified the writing side of the reporter's craft. The *World* tradition — though we too had our brilliant writers — rested primarily on the conception of the reporter as a fearless and impartial investigator and revealer of sinister secrets.

The World War, that killed so many things, including no doubt a great many that were more important and a few that were more admirable, impartially slew them both. The reason was simple enough.

Both the *Sun* tradition of newspaper work as witty and amusing writing, and the *World* tradition of it as a continuous crusade in some vaguely visualized 'public interest' — which in practice usually meant publishing a lot of facts in which the public really wasn't in the least interested, merely because somebody, for presumably unsocial motives, was trying to keep them hidden — rested upon the same foundation of the predominantly local interests of their readers.

It was then, and it is now, all a question of what the public wants in the way of news. But the public can't tell you what it wants, because the public itself doesn't know. All that the public can do is tell you, after you

have put your own best guess before it, what it doesn't want. But as long as the guessing need only be done in the purely local field, wrong guesses were not so ruinously expensive, and consequently far less immediately fatal to the paper making them.

Joseph Pulitzer from his entrenched position could, for that while, disregard the ominous figures which showed that for all his shrieking headlines blazoning Jared Flagg's iniquities, *World* circulation rose but triflingly or not at all. The paper had ample profit margin to absorb unnoticed the comparatively trifling cost of my six weeks' adventures.

But today the public (or so at least the newspaper proprietors are unanimously convinced) insists on knowing what is going on this minute in Ethiopia, in Moscow, in Inner Mongolia, and all the other uttermost parts of the earth. Obviously these are highly expensive tastes on the public's part. Too much so to permit the newspaper itself to indulge any longer in such personal luxuries as a fondness for crusades, for unnecessarily good writing, or for any similar forms of the old romanticism (save as some of them occasionally wanly survive on the editorial page.)

The result seems to have been a redefinition of news itself. News, to Joseph Pulitzer, was whatever he thought the public, for its own good, ought to be told about. But today news is what clever judges — realistic up to and often beyond the verge of cynicism — think the public itself really wants to be told about the currently revealed facts of human behavior and misbehavior.

Naturally, any destruction, whether it takes place in New York newspaper publishing or in, for instance,

Ethiopia, of the illusion that one man knows what is good for a lot of other people, is just so much clear gain. But there is another point about which I am not quite so sure.

Selection among the currently revealed facts seems also to have pretty well eliminated positive effort by the newspaper to uncover interesting facts not currently revealed. The money that used to pay for the big — and able — local reporting staff competent to dig out such facts is needed now for cable and telegraph tolls.

Perhaps this too is an improvement. But with the passing of the antiquated and romantic notion that a newspaper should be a positive moral force in its community, a lot of the zing seems to have gone out of the reporter's job.

It is quite true that often enough our zeal overflowed beyond the bounds of good manners and even human decency. Today's reporters are far too gentlemanly — or something — to do to anyone what I did to Mr. Andrews and Miss Frederick. But they are also too gentlemanly — or something — ever to pry behind the neatly typewritten 'hand-outs' of the 'public relations counsels' of the business mighty and the 'assistant secretaries' of the politically mighty.

All I know is that our way was a lot more fun. I am the last person on earth to scorn the romantic tradition of my one-time craft. Nobody ever followed it more fervently than I; and besides, it was that very tradition which brought me the rare privilege of working (though I gravely doubt that that is the proper verb to use) with Eddie Breker.

I despair of doing anything remotely resembling justice here to Eddie, the unique and irreplaceable.

But as the one person who knew him most nearly as he was, I recognize my duty at least to try.

## II

Eddie Breker, in his own mind, and for a surprisingly long time in the minds of his superiors, was the last and the greatest upholder of the *World's* mighty sleuth-hound tradition; last and most mysterious and masterful of all the long line of *World* 'investigators.'

In actuality, he differed from his predecessors in that line in one not entirely unimportant particular. This difference only dawned very slowly on me, and (luckily for Eddie) more slowly still, if ever, on his employers. Those others had, when they were sent forth to investigate, at least semi-occasionally come back with what they were sent for.

But since I sat down to write this chapter I have been racking my brain conscientiously to recall a single mystery to which Eddie Breker was assigned, during more than five years in which we were fellow-members of the *World* city staff, which he succeeded in solving. I cannot think of one. It seems, in retrospect, to have been Eddie's melancholy fate always to be assigned to insoluble mysteries. Or, if they weren't insoluble at the time he was assigned to them, under his handling they always speedily became so.

On one theory, at least, Eddie Breker was well equipped to be a great detective — it was the last thing anyone, seeing him, could conceivably have suspected him of being.

He was little, and meagerly, even frailly built; he

could not have weighed much over a hundred pounds, and he carried himself with a stoop, neck thrust forward and eyes peering doubtfully, so that he looked not only even smaller than he was, but utterly harmless and ineffectual. In hair and coloring he was pale blonde, rather as though he had been washed until he faded. His features were of a rather German cast, but he had almost no chin whatever.

His whole manner was diffident, hesitant, and uncertain; he had a trick of ending each low-voiced sentence on a rising inflection, as though he were ready to withdraw it instantly at a hint of disagreement. His appearance and manner did not in the least belie him; no gentler, kindlier soul than Eddie Breker ever lived. He could no more have arrested a murderer than he could have harmed a fly. May the earth that these fifteen years has covered him, lie lightly on him to the end of time!

Finally, to add the last touch of inconsequence to his rôle as the *World's* premier investigator, he had been a highly imaginative press-agent for Dreamland, Coney Island's one-time great rival to Luna Park as an amusement enterprise; and he, of all living men, kept in his cellar as a pet, a lion cub that had been given him by Captain Jack Bonavita.

A very few of the old-timers will still remember how, on the night that Dreamland, in one of the most spectacular fires New York City ever saw, was utterly destroyed, the night city editor of the *World* stubbornly refused to send men to cover the story. He was convinced that it was another of 'Eddie Breker's fakes.'

Eddie himself, probably, wished for a short time, next morning, that it had been. For those flames, all too real, had also burned up his job. But right there came the

great inspiration that was to transform his life. He discovered that his association with *World* reporters had imbued him also with the mighty vision of Joseph Pulitzer. He too would labor thenceforth in the people's cause, discovering the sinister secrets of the metropolis. And somehow — I have already indicated what simple, confiding folk our editors were — his fervor and sincerity were so convincing that Eddie got the job.

The occasion of my own first meeting with him adds, for me, a still further ironic twist, where Heaven knows no more were needed, to my memories of his career. For it was in the case of the vanished Dorothy Arnold. And in all newspaper work there was never another story like that.

The very weirdest part of it all is that here is one story of which we know nothing, except that there *is*, because there must be, a story which nobody has ever been able to find out, and which now probably nobody ever will find out.

It isn't the story itself, but only the bare evidence that a story must exist, that a young and fairly attractive but in no way remarkable young girl, daughter of a quietly well-to-do American family — presenting, up to the last moment, not one single even mildly unusual feature to lay hold upon, either in her life or her surroundings — walks out of her home one pleasant morning, walks into Central Park, and never comes out again; from that moment vanishes, never to be seen or heard of from that moment, anywhere.

That was the maddening thing about it from the newspaper point of view. Not only had nothing, seemingly, ever happened beforehand to explain or even hint at explaining that one utterly grotesque event; nothing more

whatever ever happened afterward. The girl merely was not found, then or ever; there were no clues; there was nothing. It is the one experience in my life that seems completely to give the lie to the idea that events cannot happen without causes and without results.

But the newspapers, if only through sheer exasperation, simply could not let the matter drop. There was absolutely nothing more to be printed. Every conceivable or inconceivable theory; every rumor, plausible or incredible; every anecdote, however trivial, bearing remotely on the case, had been recounted to final exhaustion. And still the unquiet ghost of Dorothy Arnold continued to haunt the city rooms of the New York newspapers; was destined to haunt them for years, and I suppose still haunts them today — with the dimmer wraith of Charley Ross, the more recent specters of Russey's Lane and of Judge Crater, and such others as revisit the glimpses of the moon.

Dorothy Arnold had, as I recall it, disappeared while I was in the midst of the Flagg case. But not long after that affair's temporarily triumphant conclusion I was called to the city desk to receive the thrilling news that I had been assigned to the Arnold mystery and was to work under the orders of Mr. Breker, who had full charge of the investigation.

I had, of course, already heard much of Mr. Breker. He was a favorite subject for awed speculation among the artless cubs of the staff, in the daily discussion groups which had developed a curious habit of coagulating spontaneously around my desk while we waited for assignments. And for all the lordliness with which I domineered over those discussions, I myself was more impressed than I would have cared to admit by the hushed tones in



which the other youngsters spoke of the staff's mightiest sleuth, and by the enigmatic figure of the Great Investigator himself as from time to time he slipped silently into the city room, hurried noiselessly to the desk, and after a brief muttered colloquy departed as unobtrusively as he had come, no living soul knew whither.

Nobody, indeed, has ever succeeded in being quite so mysterious as Eddie Breker, on those rare appearances in the city room in full daylight. But now, at last, I stood face to face with the Man of Mystery, waiting in trembling eagerness for the investigating to begin.

### III

The great Breker stepped closer to the city editor's desk, stooped, and spoke inaudibly in his ear. Mr. Morse nodded acquiescence, filled out a paper slip, and attached his signature. Picking me up with his eyes, Eddie left silently on cat-like feet, heading for the elevators.

Our first stop, quite unexpectedly to me, was no farther away than the ground floor, where, at the cashier's window, Eddie presented his slip — an order for some expense money. It was my first and in many ways my greatest lesson in the art of detection by the Breker system. It was one which the master himself never forgot; one from which he never to my knowledge deviated, though he were going no farther than across Park Row to the City Hall. 'Always get some expense money.'

Still silently, the master mind led the way to the subway. We boarded an uptown express. Suspecting him to be revolving plans and stratagems in that mighty brain, I did not venture any conversation. I did think it

strange — knowing that the Arnold residence, toward which I had supposed we were heading, was far uptown — when at Fourteenth Street we changed to a local; but I followed in mute obedience. My wonder grew when we left the train at Twenty-Third Street. He must, thought I, have unearthed a clue in this neighborhood that he wants me to follow up.

As we walked up Fourth Avenue the Great Investigator turned his head from side to side, like a hound sniffing the air. I thrilled to the imminent ardors of the chase. And then at last he turned to me and spoke.

‘Care to have a beer?’ said he.

Now in those days young ladies — as my mother had emphatically impressed upon me — were not seen entering the ‘Ladies’ Entrances’ of New York saloons. It had also been made clear to me that beer was essentially a vulgar and ‘unladylike’ drink. (How long is it since I have heard that word?) When or how these social distinctions crept into the field of liquid refreshment, I don’t know. Long since, of course, they have crept out again. But the historic fact remains that in the pre-war epoch, though ladies might, in moderation, drink wine, never might they touch beer and still be ladies.

But I was a newspaper woman now; and it was equally well known that the life of a reporter was a Bohemian one — and Bohemia meant beer. It was expected of you, just as all male reporters were expected to smoke pipes, dress slouchily, and have hearts of gold.

Torn by conflicting loyalties, I hesitated fully the tenth part of a second before accompanying Eddie into a rather dingy ‘restaurant’ attached to a much bigger barroom, across the street from Madison Square Garden — the old Garden, that really was on Madison Square.

In one respect, at least, Eddie's instincts as an investigator never to my knowledge failed him. He could always be trusted to find the places where good beer and good company could both be had. And on this occasion, in that back room that called itself a restaurant we found, seated at a table, Charley Macauley, then the *World's* cartoonist, and Dexter Fellows, then and now press agent for Ringling's Circus — long may he wave!

And there, amid genial talk, that whole afternoon was suffered to float leisurely by upon a gently-flowing tide of beer; until at last the Great Investigator once more bestirred himself.

'Here,' said he, 'it's nearly five o'clock. Listen, girly; you better report to the desk for both of us.

'Tell the boss I went up in the Bronx to trail a discharged servant of the Arnolds whose name and address I finally dug out of that chauffeur I told him about yesterday; and you're watching the house until I return. You might tell him you've tried with three people so far for an introduction to Mrs. Arnold, but haven't had any luck so far, though you have a couple more to try tomorrow morning. That way we won't either of us have to go back to the office tonight, and it'll let you out of reporting early tomorrow morning, too.'

That may not have been exactly what he told me to say on this particular occasion. In later years I was the transmitter of so many of Eddie's telephoned reports to the city desk that the individual instances have blurred in my mind. (He had a theory, I believe, that his tales seemed more convincing when they were thus relayed.) But it was something bearing an equally close relation to our actual activities of that afternoon.

My education in the art of investigation, I reflected as

I carried out my orders, was proceeding at a dizzy pace. Certainly I hadn't dreamed, during my own amateurish efforts on the Flagg case, how simple a matter investigating work might become, once you had really mastered its principles.

Next day we actually went up and hung around the Arnold house for a while, just to make sure Dorothy didn't come back and walk in through the front door at an unexpected moment. Eddie pridefully escorted me into a building directly opposite. It was a small 'walk-up' apartment-house whose first-floor front was vacant. We went up and entered this; the door was open. In the bare front room, at a window whose shade was pulled down to within six inches of the bottom of the sash, were two up-ended soapboxes.

'See?' said Eddie dramatically. 'My lookout! I paid the landlord ten bucks to let me use this. From here we can keep the Arnold house under constant observation!'

What we could have observed had we done so, and what we could have done about it after we had observed it, were points he didn't bother to explain; and of course we didn't even come anywhere near doing so. But after about six weeks even Eddie wearied of intermittently watching the grocer's boy and the milkmen and the man from the cleaners, and surrendered his post of vantage. Still, he only surrendered it in favor of a new idea which had the added attraction of taking us to Sound Beach, to the summer home of the Arnolds. I don't even remember now precisely what we were going to discover there; but no child ever loved the thrill of going away on a railroad train, though it were for no more than a half-hour ride, more than Eddie Breker.

I won't attempt to recount all, or one tenth, of the ex-

peditions and notions and sheer inventions he devised, over a period of some three years, and presented to his superiors as serious and promising avenues of search for Dorothy Arnold. Sherman Morse retired as city editor, and was succeeded by Arthur Clarke — as fine a city editor, as every old *World* man can tell you, as the more famous Boss Clarke of the *Sun* — but still the Arnold mystery was bread and butter and beer (and out-of-town trips) to Eddie Breker. And I wouldn't do him the injustice of failing to mention the unselfishness with which he shared many of those trips with me.

One of them, in fact, was mine altogether. It took me to every accessible Roman Catholic convent in the country, as far west as Buffalo and as far south as Raleigh, North Carolina, to search for Dorothy Arnold among the novices. But the only adventure that resulted for me fell out in Wilmington, Delaware.

I had arrived in that city very late at night, and had a good deal of difficulty in getting a room at the hotel — the old Clayton House. Some sort of convention was in progress — perhaps a reunion of the du Pont family — and the hotels were crowded. I thought the clerk's manner as I registered was a bit peculiar, but put it down to the probable fact that he was not only harassed by the convention confusion, but was not much used to having strange young women descend upon him at midnight and alone.

But I was really annoyed when, about an hour after I had at last gotten to sleep, I was awakened by a pounding on my door and the announcement that 'two gentlemen' wanted to see me. Naturally I put the most insulting possible interpretation upon this extraordinary statement; and rising in all the fury of my still funda-

mental Irish-Harlem sense of the proprieties, I delivered — through the keyhole — an oration which made it clear that I saw no reason for my meeting any gentlemen; that in fact I saw no reason for describing my would-be callers as gentlemen; and that if I were further disturbed, I would call the police.

‘But these are policemen, ma’am,’ was the dumbfounding reply; ‘I think you had better see them, ma’am.’

#### IV

I defy anybody, however conscious of the complete innocence of her whole life and purposes, to receive such a statement as that without a coldness of the spinal column. I could not for the life of me recall any recent crimes of which I could reasonably be suspected; but for all that I tumbled my clothes on with trembling fingers, and emerged to answer the summons of the law — and to discover, to my complete exasperation, that after vainly searching seven states for Dorothy Arnold, I was being haled forth for questioning on suspicion of being, myself, Dorothy.

On that occasion Eddie was nowhere about; had he been, I am morally certain he would, with the best possible intentions, have managed somehow to make matters a whole lot worse. Probably he would have refused to reveal our real identities, and by the very fervor of his protestations that I was not Dorothy, would have so completely confirmed the suspicions of the Wilmington police that we should have both wound up in cells.

It gradually became clear to me, as I continued to be assigned to ‘work’ with Eddie Breker, that his attitude

toward his job and his livelihood was precisely that of a small boy toward school. We of the city staff, to his notion, were fellow pupils who owed each other complete gang loyalty as against our 'teacher' — that is, our city editor, whom at the same time, to complete the paradox, Eddie genuinely liked and admired. But if at any time he could contrive to hoodwink that much-enduring man into granting some extra privileges (the more totally undeserved the better) that was a triumph to be hugged to his small-boy heart.

Obviously, to the kind of 'investigator' that Eddie was the case of Dorothy Arnold might have been sent direct from Heaven. The facts themselves were so completely incredible that any theory he might spin, however fantastic, would look plausible beside them; and as it proved, he was in no danger of having Dorothy reappear at the precise moment and in the very place in which he was supposed to be looking for her, and wasn't.

Still, human nature being what it is, New York City could be trusted to produce, at fairly frequent intervals, some other weird happening almost as well suited as the Arnold case to Eddie's peculiar genius; and since, I think, he really was rather fond of me (as I couldn't help being of him) he generally managed to find some sort of excuse to have me assigned to work with him.

One such story sticks in my mind as a striking example of that queer phenomenon of which we had so many grotesque displays during and just after the War — rumor hysteria. And like many of those wild war rumors, it never has been conclusively either proved or disproved to this day.

In the early fall of 1912, the *World* began to be bombarded from all sorts of sources and people by a tale of a

mysterious and disgraceful tragedy that was said to have taken place in one of the big Brooklyn department stores. The story had many variations, but was fundamentally the same; and the narrator usually wound up with the remark, highly insulting to the *World* of those days, 'Of course you people will never do anything about this, because the story is about such a big advertiser.'

That challenge couldn't be refused. So Eddie and I set forth to find out, if we could, the truth of a yarn which by that time was being repeated, and in most cases firmly believed, by thousands of people all over the city — that a young woman employee of the store concerned, after having been abominably mistreated by one or more of the high officials thereof (the precise set of horrifying details in each version depending upon the degree of gruesomeness of the imagination possessed by the immediate narrator), had either leaped or been thrown down an elevator shaft in the store building, and been instantly killed.

The first thing we discovered was that not one of the people who had written letters or come in person to the *World* office to demand that we do something about such horrible happenings could be of the slightest help to us. Not one of them, when cornered, could so much as remember who had first told them the story. The best they had to offer was to repeat, feebly, that 'it was all over Brooklyn'; and we not only knew that already, but soon began to suspect that they themselves had played a considerable part in spreading it there.

The next thing we found was that the police had heard the story almost if not quite as soon as the *World* had, and had already run it down and disposed of it to their own satisfaction as a vicious hoax. They inclined to the



belief that it had been started by a discharged employee.

That, for any other reporter in New York, would have been enough; but not for an investigator of Eddie Breker's caliber.

## V

He discussed the problem with me, long and earnestly, over various seidels of beer. It was, in fact, on this occasion, if I remember correctly, that he first fully unfolded for my benefit the four fundamental principles of the Breker school of investigation.

The first, and greatest, has already been mentioned: 'Always get some expense money.'

The second: 'Never hang around the office.'

The third: 'Never let a story look too easy. If you get the whole thing from the very first person you see, don't bring it right in. They might give you another assignment. [Eddie was on salary, not on 'space' rates.] Call up at the end of a couple of hours and report that you're working hard on it and have a line on the man you're after, but don't know yet whether or not he'll talk.'

The fourth: 'Always report in regularly — by phone.' These reports of Eddie's, as I may have already indicated, were really the keystone of his entire system. They were masterpieces of resourcefulness, drama, and suspense. The only trifling detail they may occasionally have lacked was truthfulness.

The true greatness of these principles will possibly be faintly indicated if I record the results achieved by their skillful application to this Brooklyn affair. As I have intimated, the average conscientious cub, lacking Eddie

Breker's imagination and resourcefulness, could scarcely have kept that assignment alive twenty-four hours after he found the police had given it up. I myself, without the master's guiding hand, would scarcely have done much better. Some men who really considered themselves experienced and competent newspaper men, learning that none of the people repeating the yarn had a suspicion of a fact to go on, and that the police had searched the store from top to bottom without uncovering so much as a suspicious circumstance, would then and there have made a report to the city desk that would have sent them back to covering two-alarm fires; and serve them right.

Compare with this the actual results the tale yielded under Eddie's masterly handling. We remained on the assignment for exactly three weeks; we drew and accounted for about fifty dollars in expense money; and to crown all, when his unfailing intuitions told him it was time to quit (Eddie never in all the years I knew him was guilty of overstaying the market) he took the initiative in persuading Boss Clarke to abandon the investigation; presenting a report so conclusive and so convincing in its wealth of detail that we were each awarded a prize of ten dollars for what the notice on the bulletin board described as 'good work on the Brooklyn department-store mystery.'

Almost as fine an opportunity for Eddie, and as beautifully managed, was the hilarious series of events known as the 'poison-needle cases.'

This fell out in the summer of 1913, in the midst of what used to be called the 'silly season' (a term abandoned, I suppose, when the war and prohibition successively demonstrated that no time of the year has a monopoly on silliness).

It began when a young woman, head waitress of a little restaurant located, as I remember, on Columbus Avenue near Sixty-Sixth Street, suddenly ran screaming out into the street, seized the nearest policeman, hurried him back into the restaurant, and demanded that he arrest a young man whom she pointed out to him.

So frantic were her accusations that the somewhat slow-witted cop finally took both parties to the police station, where on the girl's charges the young man was locked up. Her story, disentangled and reduced to something remotely resembling coherence, went something like this:

For some time the young man had been hanging around the restaurant, making what I believe are now known as 'passes' at her. (What she actually said I don't know; the next day's newspapers unanimously and chastely described the young man's propositions as 'improper advances.') On this occasion he had invited her to inhale some perfume he had sprinkled on his handkerchief. She did not explain why, under the circumstances, she had acceded; but she asserted that upon doing so she had immediately felt a sensation of weakness and giddiness — 'everything went black' — and she realized that (of course from the worst possible motives) the villain had attempted to drug her.

Precisely how any even moderately fiendish purpose could have been carried out in a public restaurant in the middle of the afternoon, she didn't, then or later, explain.

So far, so good. But the unlucky wight turned out to be a South American. Thereupon some pale imitation of Eddie Breker on one of the evening papers, into whose hands the story fell, and who probably had been filling

in his leisure time on a diet of progenitors of the modern 'pulp' magazines, seized the golden opportunity. What mysterious drug had the villain used? Could it have been the unknown woorali or curare poison, used by the South American Indians on their arrows and blow-gun darts? One drop of this hellish brew was said to produce instant and total paralysis in the victim; presumably one whiff of it would suffice to deprive a lady of her will-power. And of course all South Americans, with motives of which the less said the better, notoriously and habitually carry, in their vest-pockets, bottles of this rare drug unknown to medical science.

Nothing more than this was needed to start the hue and cry. The very next day another young woman dragged another unfortunate into another police station. He had, she asserted, jabbed her in the arm with a poisoned needle; and thereafter this became the approved method of attack.

How many 'victims,' altogether, proclaimed themselves during the six weeks it took for the hysteria to run its course, I don't remember; but there must have been at least twenty. And at its height it was no joke. A young man durst not sit down beside a strange young woman in the subway lest she leap screaming to her feet and, aided by the officious fools she was sure to find among the other passengers, hale him to the nearest police station — which, unless he kept his own head and was exceptionally lucky besides, he stood a good chance of only reaching considerably the worse for wear.

The story, of course, was made to order for Eddie Breker. While the excitement was at its height you could print literally anything you chose about it. The public, seemingly, ate it up; and the 'victims' themselves, when

they read the wild statements attributed to them in the papers next morning, were immediately convinced that that was exactly what they had said, and that had been precisely the way 'it' happened. You were, in other words, not in the slightest danger of being embarrassed by a trace of reality in the whole business.

As Frank Ward O'Malley once sagely remarked, 'Facts can gum up a good story frightfully'; and what could be more delightful, then, than a story in which there never had been any facts in the first place?

But since all the other papers were 'playing it up' (and each of them no doubt excusing itself for doing so by that selfsame plea) and since it was barely possible that there *might* be something in it, the *World* felt it was best to be on the safe side and have Eddie Breker investigate.

So while I interviewed the 'victims' (with such results as might be expected) Eddie went portentously forth, following clues too subtle to be divulged to any other living soul. He was still 'investigating' when, with a series of abrupt dismissals in the Magistrates' Courts, the whole sensational mystery evaporated and left no more than a faint and slightly sickish odor behind.

## VI

But it would be unfair to imply that, on a real story, Eddie Breker was not capable of becoming a competent, and according to his lights, a hard-working and conscientious reporter. I remember that I worked with him on some of the vast ramifications of the Rosenthal murder case (the case that made Charles S. Whitman Governor of New York and sent Police Lieutenant Becker and his four hired gunmen to the chair), and on several other cases in which he did all that any man could have done.

Still, you never knew when, even on the seemingly most commonplace of assignments, Eddie's over-stimulated imagination would suddenly prompt him to introduce some of his own peculiar, often hilarious, and always exasperating variations into the normal routine of affairs. I recall a characteristic and illuminating example in the Turner murder case, near Lakewood, New Jersey, in the winter of 1912-13.

The story itself was a tragic and pitiful one. A Mrs. Turner, the young wife of a local mechanic, who herself worked out in domestic service, had been brutally murdered in a patch of woods near the outskirts of the village, through which ran a path which she had been accustomed to use as a short cut on her way to work in the early morning.

Eddie was at once assigned to the story, and promptly, on sending in his first report, managed to include plausible reasons why I should be sent down at once to help him.

I was to take a late train — the last one that ran that night — to Point Pleasant, where Eddie was instructed to meet me in a car hired for the purpose, and bring me back

to Lakewood. Point Pleasant was, and I suppose still is, the last station on a little branch line of the Central Railroad of New Jersey, almost at the tip of a long, narrow sandspit, in many places scarcely a hundred yards wide, separating Barnegat Bay from the ocean. It is a lonely place even in summer, and in winter it is desolate.

It was a long and dreary ride. One by one, as we stopped at one little station after another, the few other passengers got out, until, save for the crew, I was alone on the train. It chugged monotonously on along the beach, while I sat huddled in a daycoach seat, watching the full moon rise over the vast tumbling waste of waters to the east, and the big waves rush up, foaming and hissing, it seemed to our very car-wheels.

We reached Point Pleasant about eleven, and I timorously descended. The little station was locked and deserted; a single electric bulb burned dimly above the door, under the wide projecting roof. The cold moonlight lay on the gray sand; the only sound, save the panting of the engine, was the harsh whisper of the sea. I walked around the station; no Eddie, nor any other living soul.

The engine, uncoupled, puffed down the track a little way, and came back to couple on at the other end for the first trip in the morning. The engineer and fireman climbed down. The conductor and trainman had already plodded away; the fireman followed them, but the engineer came awkwardly over.

'You all right, lady? Can I see you to where you're goin'?'

'Oh, I'm all right,' said I bravely; 'some people are to meet me; they'll be here any minute.'

'All right, lady... I'm sorry, but I have to put this light out.'

'All right.'

'Good-night, ma'am.'

'Good-night.'

The crunch of his footsteps died away in the distance. Now there was no sound but the ceaseless wash of the Atlantic on the beach. I huddled beside my suitcase on a baggage truck, watching the moving silver between the black train-wheels; trying not to remember that a little while ago, only a few miles from where I sat, utterly alone, another young woman had been shamefully beaten to death — and that the murderer was still at large.

I looked around, hoping to see the lights of an approaching car; and my heart died within me. Coming down the railroad track toward me was a man!

He was tall and lanky, and one arm was stretched out straight in a queer, threatening gesture. Too paralyzed with terror even to slip off the truck and hide under it, I cowered lower against its uprights and waited for death. And waited. And nothing happened. I looked around, at last, again. The man was still there. He hadn't moved an inch. He couldn't. He was a switch semaphore.

In the reaction from that awful fright, I stood up and tried to hum to myself; I walked briskly and valiantly up and down. But my would-be cheerful little tunes went out into the illimitable, cold, and gleaming void and found no echo; they were futile against the indifference of the unceasing, slow, and tireless stirring of the ocean along the shore. Soon enough I was glad to give it up and once more crouch shivering on the truck in the deepest of the shadow, watching its sharp black edge creep slowly out across the white sand, and trying desperately to keep warmth in my body by thinking of all the things I should like to do to Eddie Breker.



Even that ceased soon enough to be interesting, and a period ensued during which I no longer thought at all. All feeling had left my entire body, and I was slowly but surely sinking into what might for all I know have been a final stupor, when at long last my half-frozen eardrums caught the distant mutter of an approaching automobile.

It was Eddie; and he had a reporter from one of the other papers with him. They had, I learned from this youngster, started in plenty of time to meet the train; but within a mile or so of Point Pleasant it had occurred to Eddie that it was a cold night and I might suffer a chill. So he had insisted on turning around and driving all the way back to Lakewood to get a bottle of brandy for me!

I was too nearly benumbed and too greatly relieved that he had remembered to come at all, to waste my shivering breath in pointing out what seemed to me decided weaknesses in his process of reasoning. I climbed painfully into the car, was solicitously bundled in somebody's greatcoat and a rug, and in due time thankfully found myself snug in bed in the Lakewood Hotel.

Immediately after breakfast, next morning, Eddie began to explain to me how deplorably slack and probably incompetent he had found the local authorities to be. They were no more fit to handle a murder investigation than so many old women, and it was going to be up to us to solve the mystery, if it ever was going to be solved.

The fact was that the case was, as it stood, insoluble. There were neither witnesses nor clues; there wasn't even any further information (except the usual vague and meaningless tales of 'suspicious-looking strangers') on which to keep the case alive as a news story. So Eddie

had decided that his only hope of prolonging his visit to the comfortable Lakewood Hotel was to be found in casting animadversions upon the county detective and the sheriff.

This was, of course, not difficult. He was quite capable of sitting in the sun-porch of the hotel and evolving out of his own inner consciousness a dozen suggestions as to things that, in his opinion, the officials should have done and hadn't done, or had done that they shouldn't have done, with further comments on things he admitted they should have done, but thought they had done badly.

But not unnaturally, when the news despatches he wove out of these ideas, published in the *World*, arrived in Lakewood next day, the people with whose jobs they dealt in such lordly fashion were not particularly pleased.

This did not, at first, trouble Eddie. (Have I mentioned that the fox in his bosom was his profound secret conviction that he should have been Chief of the United States Secret Service?) He went on to point out in still further detail just how a real detective would have handled the case; and thereby of course still further enhanced his popularity with the Ocean County officials.

After about four days of this, however, the story was utterly played out. Not the slightest clue to the murderer had been discovered, nor ever was. And still Eddie continued to send in his views regarding the shortcomings of the sheriff and the county detective; until at last, one afternoon, he all but burst into my room, just before dinner-time, in a state of wild excitement.

## VII

'We've got to get out of this, and not lose a minute!' he shouted at me. 'The sheriff has sworn out warrants for both of us on a charge of obstructing justice, on account of that story I sent in last night, and he and two deputies are on their way over to arrest us, right now!'

All I could do was stand and stare at him. By this time I had thought I knew my Eddie Breker fairly well; but this was quite beyond any previous experience. At first blush it sounded utterly preposterous; and yet — those stories of his had been pretty rough on the sheriff — rural officials were often vindictive — certainly Eddie's excitement seemed genuine enough —

'Listen,' he chattered. 'Listen. There's only one thing to do. We've got to get out the back way in disguise. I've tipped the head porter to let us out by the baggage entrance, and I've got a car waiting.'

'Now I'll tell you what we'll do. Give me one of your dresses and your coat and hat and veil, and I'll go to my room and put them on, and bring you my clothes to wear.'

I went on looking at him, and gradually I realized that he actually meant it. At about the same time I became conscious that somewhere along the line my mouth had dropped open — I couldn't remember exactly when. With some difficulty I got it closed once more. But the combined effort of accomplishing this and maintaining an upright position proved too much for me; as I closed my mouth, my knees gave way and let me down on the bed.

Having already said that Eddie was little, skinny, and frail, I should explain here that I was, and am, of proportions that do justice — and, of later years, increasingly

ample justice — to a long line of gigantic Irish ancestors.

Gradually a picture — a moving picture — formed itself in my mind. I saw us, costumed according to Eddie's ideas, stealing out at the back door of the hotel, unobserved save by a delighted group of colored waiters. I saw us, still in costume, in an automobile at full speed, pursued by the sheriff of Ocean County, his whiskers streaming in the wind. Finally I saw us, attired as Eddie had proposed, appearing in the *World* office that night to report to Bill Thayer, kindest, squarest, ablest night city editor that ever sat at a desk, but possessed, unfortunately, of one of the world's keenest senses of humor. At this point my own composure utterly gave way.

Eddie stood where he was, hopping from one foot to the other. He came as near being angry, I think, as I whooped and howled and mopped my streaming eyes, as he ever did or could in his life. But gradually a sheepish grin crept over his face; just such a grin as you see on the face of a ten-year-old boy who has been caught in some performance that he knows will be ridiculous in grown-up eyes.

'Listen,' he begged; 'cut out the laughing and be serious. Honest, we're going to be arrested if we don't get out of here quick. Please hurry up and pack; and at least give me that long coat of yours and a hat and veil to wear and come on out the back way.'

Too weak with laughter for further argument, I gave in. A few minutes later two female (if you didn't look too closely) figures crept stealthily down the back stairs, out through the baggage door and into an automobile, which at once drove off at top speed. It might have been observed, had anyone been there to see, that the larger of these figures carefully refrained from looking at the

smaller. One more glimpse of Eddie Breker's wistful Teutonic countenance peering out from beneath my hat and veil would have been ruinous to my hard-won and precariously retained composure. Indeed, when I think of it even now . . .

Of course no warrant for our arrest ever had been issued. I doubt if the sheriff had even threatened to apply for one. But Eddie had realized that the story was at an end. Not all his ingenuity could have kept us in Lakewood more than a day longer; and it was always his policy not to wait for orders to return to the office.

Since go we must, I think the small boy inside him said to Eddie, let's at least fix up something that will give us an excuse for a spectacular departure.

Well . . . I still rather think he succeeded.

## THE AGE OF INNOCENCE

## I

ANOTHER great trouble with my success in putting Jared Flagg, master swindler of his deplorably primitive era, in jail — for a few days — was that it identified me forever, in the eyes of my superiors, with assignments, whenever they could find them, more or less of the same bizarre pattern as that remarkable affair.

This of course had its compensations; notably when it seemed that Eddie Breker and I constituted, in our superiors' eyes, the *World's* star sleuthing team. And at its worst it wasn't quite so bad as the fate that overtook more than one cub of my acquaintance who had the ill luck to make his first hit with a humorous story, and so be branded for life as a funny man. This was particularly hard to bear in connection with those stories which recurred regularly as part of the custom of the town, such as the appearance of a new edition of the telephone book, and for which office tradition demanded humorous — or allegedly humorous — treatment.

I have myself gnashed a tooth or two at times in my efforts to find anything whatever new to say about the Horse Show or the 'Easter Parade'; I once even de-

scended so low as to devise a broken-English interview on the Easter fashions with a visiting Parisian modiste — one Madame Boulot — who was wholly a figment of my own imagination. But my heart went out to the poor lad who, each and every Sunday night in summer, had to struggle with the story of the day's grist of lost babies, rescued swimmers, and arrests for indecent bathing-suits at Coney Island, and to whom Bill Thayer's invariable and sardonic instructions were: 'I can see where you're going to make it funny as hell.'

But after the Flagg case I myself never knew at what moment I was going to be snatched, without the slightest warning, away from the usual humdrum of murders, suffrage parades, suicides, weddings, robberies, divorces, breach-of-promise suits, and other odd or quaint scandals which in those simple times filled the local reporter's days, and sent forth to exercise my wiles upon still another of what gradually became a wilder diversity of human creatures than ever before troubled the dreams of a comparatively simple-minded Irish girl from Harlem.

Still, it was educational — in a way. Educational in the picturesque possibilities of human nature and the remarkable directions it can develop when several million individual specimens of it are gathered together in one place. It was on Manhattan Island, for instance, in places separated from each other by no more than a mile or so, and on occasions no more than weeks apart, that among others scarcely more incongruous I made the personal acquaintances of Misses Emma Goldman and Anne Morgan; of that weird character whom Eddie Breker out of his vast experience with Oriental occultism (of the Coney Island brand) had christened 'Oom the Omnipotent'; and of John D. Rockefeller, Sr.



A BAFFLING INTERVIEW WITH JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER





I owed my encounter with this last-named gentleman to the excitement generated by the Pujo Committee's investigation of the 'Money Trust.' It was my task to waylay the 'Oil King,' as the newspapers then still called him, at the door of the Fifth Avenue Baptist Church one Sunday morning, stroll with him up the Avenue, and charm him by my sirenical wiles into telling me all of the things that Samuel Untermyer, Frank P. Walsh, and others of the most famous cross-examiners of America had failed utterly to extract from him upon the witness stand.

About all, however, that can be said for that brave attempt is that Mr. Rockefeller's manners proved exquisite, and his patience nothing short of saintly — but that when better interviewers are made, John D. will baffle them.

Still, at least I did have the interesting experience of meeting him, and conversing with him for half an hour or so — if it could be called conversing. On another occasion I didn't even get that far. And yet I am quite sure that the person whose acquaintance I completely failed, after several weeks of effort, to make was one of the most remarkable and interesting human beings in the New York of my time. I don't even know whether this person was a man or a woman. But somehow I have always felt that she was a woman, and one very much worth knowing.

This story begins on a day when a successful but badly worried business man came to the *World* with a tale of woe. His wife, he said, had become an incurable gambler, who if she were allowed to continue her present course would ruin both him and herself. And he laid the responsibility for her downfall upon an establishment of which not even the *World* had ever before heard so much as a rumor — a gambling-house open only to

women, running full blast somewhere in the middle Fifties, which, he said, if his wife's stories were to be believed, must rival Canfield's (then of recent and gorgeous memory) in luxury, and pretty nearly rival it also in the wildness of the play and the size of the stakes.

The queer part of it is that the story was true. Back in those 'peaceful' pre-war days New York actually possessed — for how long I do not know, but certainly for many months at least — a gambling resort with all the attractions (of course on a smaller scale) that Deauville or Monte Carlo itself could offer, in a really beautiful, artistic, and luxurious setting, and operated solely for the benefit of the city's thousands of bored and wealthy women thrill-seekers. I know this was so, because I saw it with my own eyes and played at its tables. In fact it was I who was responsible for its closing.

Our complainant wound up his story to Boss Clarke by saying: 'I didn't know what else to do but come to the *World* about it. But since she tells me no man except the attendants is ever allowed inside the door under any circumstances, and she is even afraid to tell me exactly where it is located, I don't see what you can do.'

He very soon found out! That same afternoon I once more took up my residence at an uptown hotel, with wardrobe a bit refurbished and an ample supply of expense money. It was arranged that our informant should bring his wife to call on me next day. I was supposed to be the young wife of an important Middle Western customer, in the city on a pleasure trip; and he was to impress upon his wife that it was her duty to do everything possible to entertain me and make my visit a pleasant one.

I began the very next day to get some conception of

the kind of establishment to which I had undertaken to lay siege, and of the masterly organization behind it. At luncheon with the good lady I began to talk artlessly about my own passion for 'playing the ponies'; and when this failed to draw any response, wandered off into tales of an imaginary European trip on which, apparently, I had done little but play every conceivable gambling game, in every Casino whose name I could call to mind.

My hostess was a rather simple, friendly soul, of no great worldly experience, and under ordinary circumstances, I imagine plentifully given to gossip. But when it came to talk of gambling, she was at once under a constraint all the more marked by its contrast with her previous behavior. Once or twice, indeed, she seemed on the point of saying something; but each time thought better of it. To avoid the risk of overdoing matters on the first meeting, I eventually dropped the subject.

Somebody, thought I, has given this little woman a thorough course of training in discretion where this gambling-house is concerned. It's a wonder she even told her husband; but it means that the whole thing is carefully organized by somebody who knows his — or her — way about in this town. This, my child, is going to be good.

My premonitions proved correct. As I recall it, four or five days of persistent and innocuous gadding about the city with my new girl friend — luncheons, matinees, and shopping tours — were needed before she even began to yield to my constant pressure and chatter about horses I knew were ready to go at Pimlico, or bets I might have made at Latonia if I had had a chance, and at last darkly and hesitatingly intimated that if I really was, as I had said, 'dying to get a bet down,' she *knew a place*.

We went there the very next day. Externally, the

House of Mystery was merely one more brownstone front such as still line scores of Manhattan streets, and in those days blanketed the city for solid, unbroken square miles. But inside it was very much worth seeing.

Without the slightest sign of it visible from the street, two adjoining houses had been broken into one. The first floor — that is, in those high-stoooped houses, one flight up from the street level — had been turned into a really magnificent double dining-room, hung in dark blue velvet, with frescoed ceilings, and paintings around the walls which, to my eyes at least, looked to be of genuinely high quality. I remember particularly one thing that struck me at once: all the rooms open to the patrons had indirect lighting, which in 1913 was an impressively new touch.

The dining-room service was perfection itself; the food rivaled Delmonico's and the wine list Mouquin's. My hostess whispered that it would be considered an insult if we offered money either in payment for the luncheon or in tips.

After luncheon we strolled upstairs. In the rear, on the next floor above the dining-room, was a completely equipped pool-room with boards showing that day's race programs at Havre-de-Grace, Latonia, and I don't remember where else. Certainly every track in the country at which a race meeting was then in progress was represented. In the big double front room on this floor were six or eight large and handsome roulette tables with a full staff of croupiers on duty, around which crowds of women were already gathering.

The floor above this had rooms for baccarat, chemin-de-fer, vingt-et-un, and keno. The keno game, I remember, seemed especially popular. I don't recall seeing any

dice games. In my experience few women, hard gamblers though they often become, care much for dice games. Still higher up were private rooms for bridge and poker.

Everywhere from top to bottom of the place the same luxury was in evidence in furniture, decoration, and fittings; in every room the attendance and service moved with the same smooth perfection; and every room was steadily filling with smartly dressed women patrons. Save for the fact that none but women were to be seen, it was just such a crowd as you used to see at any big European casino or at Monte Carlo.

I proceeded at once to make good my boasts as to my own gambling proclivities by laying out some of my expense money, and picked with a knowing air sundry nags in sundry races, of none of which had I ever so much as heard before. The unexpected result was that with beginner's luck I turned up with one winner and collected 'place money' on another beast, so that I quit winner on the afternoon, besides establishing myself once for all as a horse expert with my hostess. After that we played one of the wheels for a while, and tried one or two of the other games, my hostess dropping another fifty dollars or so of her unlucky husband's hard-earned money, and I winning a few dollars more.

One of the odd quirks of this story, indeed, was my own success as a gambler. I actually came out at the end of the entire experience with all my expense money intact and with some fifty dollars of winnings, which I dutifully reported to Boss Clarke. He took back the expense money, but the fifty dollars, he assured me, was mine to keep.

A few days later my girl friend (perhaps assisted by my observed prowess as a player of the 'ponies') suc-

ceeded in convincing the powers behind the scenes, via the pool-room steward, that I could be trusted with my own card of admission. Once that had been obtained I felt fairly launched on my campaign.

The trouble was that as soon as I was launched, I found myself hard and fast aground. Not to mix metaphors, I soon discovered that I was face to face with a highly polished and utterly impregnable stone wall as far as the real secrets of the establishment were concerned. I had, in any case, to use caution, particularly in avoiding a number of ladies of the faster fringe of New York's group of wealthy women about town, whom I had early spotted among the patrons, and who might have recalled, in a fashion very inconvenient for me, that they had met me on other occasions in my true professional capacity. As it turned out, they gave me no trouble; they were all too intent on their games to notice even the woman in the next chair.

I began by scraping acquaintance with various of the other lady 'gamboliers,' generally in the dining-room — indeed it was the only place in which anybody paid attention to anybody else. Acquaintances there, however, proved easy enough to scrape; the trouble was that no useful information was to be gleaned from the scrapings.

## II

I may, in spite of all my care, have drawn suspicion upon myself. My technique was that of harmless Middle Western curiosity regarding this particular one of the sights and thrills of the big city; but perhaps it dawned on somebody, after a few days, that I was doing a sur-

prising amount of acquaintance-scraping and question-asking in proportion to the amount of gambling I did. Whatever the reason, I made no progress whatever. Perhaps, on the other hand, my failure was simply due to the superior discretion of my own sex. I can't believe that the same number of males, under similar circumstances, would have proved equally unresponsive, no matter how carefully they might have been coached to beware of inquisitive strangers.

I've often played with the idea that the proprietress herself was among the women with whom I gossiped so innocently. There isn't a doubt in my mind that many of these women, when they told me they couldn't remember who had first introduced them, or named somebody who had since dropped out or gone abroad or was otherwise out of my reach, were lying; but there was nothing I could do about it.

The attendants, one and all, were completely and suavely impenetrable. Big-eyed and innocently curious blondes evidently meant far less in their lives than did their jobs. It took no long study to make me sure that the real proprietor was not in their ranks; there was not so much as a manager, head steward, or anybody who took the lead in the slightest degree, among them. Somewhere, entirely out of sight, was the guiding hand which kept the wheels turning with such marvelous smoothness and success; but not a glimpse of that hand could I obtain.

Finally Boss Clarke gave it up. 'We'll go ahead and print the story as it lies,' he decided, on hearing the usual report from me one morning. 'I did hope you'd be able to get it complete and name the principals, but evidently they've covered themselves too well. Write everything



you have actually seen, though; it makes enough of a story to print, and the rest of it is up to the police and the District Attorney.'

Next morning, therefore, the *World* had a front-page story about the 'feminine Canfield's,' as John O'Keefe called it in his headline; and that same day that gorgeous establishment closed its doors — so far as I know, forever. The District Attorney and the police did try to follow it up; they interviewed me, although I was unable to tell them more than I had told in the published story, and secured search warrants on 'information and belief'; but when the 'strong-arm squad' called, the bird had flown; the nest was vacant and not a trace of evidence left behind.

I have never heard — and I think I still know my New York — of a comparable establishment in the city since. There are a few 'poker flats' for women only; a few semi-professional roulette lay-outs, and, of course, any number of contract bridge games run frankly for profit. But the biggest of these compares with that luxurious and vanished venture very much as a harbor tug compares with the *Normandie*. I don't believe I ever saw even a speakeasy with a more overpowering interior appearance.

I have, I repeat, always felt convinced that the moving spirit of that enterprise was a woman; and a woman whose acquaintance I am sorry to have missed.

Perhaps my too-brief association with 'Oom the Omnipotent' would, had it been permitted to develop, have proved equally rewarding to a connoisseur of the bizarre in human personality. But in this case it was my anxious superiors on the *World* who finally decided that the personal risks involved for me were greater than the probable news value of the story would justify.

My assigned purpose in the pursuit of Oom was precisely the same as in the case of Jared Flag — to effect an introduction of that gentleman to certain officers of the law who at that time had a great desire to make his acquaintance; and at the same time to provide the *World* with a succulent news beat.

My superiors had been entirely complacent about my prolonged and confidential comradeship with Jared Flag, because they were persuaded that Jared's sole interest was in my suppositious wealth; and an interest of that sort, even on the part of a Jared Flag, could scarcely be considered to constitute any really grave peril to a lady whose actual entire income was twenty dollars a week.

(I could, had it seemed advisable, have thrown a somewhat different light upon Jared's motives. But in that quaint era a girl could not afford to have it supposed that she was capable even of recognizing a threat to her unsmirched innocence. Even that much acquaintance with the ways of sin would in itself have cast at least a shadow of doubt upon that innocence itself. The truth was, of course, far otherwise. As Jerry Sigel, for example, had to his own vast amusement succeeded in demonstrating, the maiden of *circa* 1910 was if anything considerably more alert to possible threats to her innocence than she had any real need to be. But I had early realized that whole light-years of sophistication lay between Jerry Sigel's good-humored and cynical acceptance of life as he found it, and the lofty and chivalrous idealism of the *World's* unworldly editors.)

With Oom the Omnipotent, consequently, my superiors from the first suffered from the gloomiest forebodings, based upon their extremely poor opinion of *his*

motives — regarding which, I thought even then, and still think now, they may quite well have been as far astray, in a diametrically opposite direction, as they had been in the case of Jared Flagg.

At any rate, where with Jared they had let the play go forward to the ultimate grand climax, their fears — particularly Boss Clarke's, bless him — for my personal safety induced them, in the case of Oom, to break up the show by staging the big smash scene when the first-act curtain was hardly up.

The particular feature of Oom's enterprise around which police suspicions centered was a secret society, supposedly devoted to the study of Oriental religion, known as the Tantrik Order. But when, after two weeks of utterly innocuous lessons in Sanskrit, I finally succeeded in getting myself accepted as a neophyte, and the initiation ceremonies were just about to begin, in fact at the very moment when things seemed to be on the point of getting interesting, at Boss Clarke's personal instigation the police came in by squads and platoons, 'Omnipotent Oom' went down the fire-escape, and I saw him no more.

Now that Oom has long since made his peace with the authorities, and indeed has become the leading citizen of Nyack, I would not wish anyone to feel that I necessarily subscribe, or ever did, to the opinion of his philosophy and his enterprises shared, back in 1913, by the *World*, the police, and the District Attorney — not to mention the Post Office Department. As far as my personal acquaintance with the gentleman went, I can only say, as the schoolboy said of Caligula, 'he never done nothin' to me.'

And on the general question, my personal opinion of

the censorship activities of the Post Office Department long since became stabilized at its all-time low. Far too many of my own best friends have on occasion found themselves the subjects of the impertinent curiosity of the postal authorities and the police, for me to consider any activities necessarily invidious merely because such was the case. I can still remember the night that Henrietta Rodman hauled me out of bed at one o'clock in the morning to help get Agnes Smedley out of jail — her offense having been nothing more heinous than the use of the mails to offer active objection to British imperial rule in India. And descendants of Irish Fenians were among those who lent a hand to put her there.

### III

But this last-mentioned affair had nothing to do with my life and work as a *World* reporter. It was part of what might (perhaps a trifle carelessly) be called my private life as a Greenwich Villager — a type of existence which, at about the period of the professional adventures I have just been recounting, I had embraced with all possible enthusiasm.

How I actually found my way into Greenwich Village is another part of this story which shall be told in its place. It certainly afforded me a complete contrast, as village life in New York City goes, to my earlier experience of Irish Harlem; but at the time it seemed to me the only proper or indeed endurable existence for a full-fledged star (and starry-eyed) newspaper woman. And no one in those days could move into Greenwich Village without speedily coming within the orbit of Hen-

I had already met Henrietta in the course of duty, having been assigned to one of the periodic Board of Education rows stirred up by her persistent efforts to secure from that apotheosis of stuffed-shirt-dom a grudging recognition of the right of a woman teacher to motherhood. That, incidentally, among all her many 'causes' was the one to which Henrietta was faithful through good report and ill; one in which she made real sacrifices; and as it should be, the one in which, whatever happened to all the others, she won a great and genuine victory.

It is of course a commonplace to remind students of recent social history that the Greenwich Village of just before the War was a state of mind. It had neither accurate geographical, intellectual, nor spiritual boundaries. The Liberal Club was somewhere down in Bleecker Street; but the Civic Club, before it moved to West Twelfth Street just off Fifth Avenue, into the discarded quarters of the Salmagundi Club, occupied rooms in East Thirty-First Street, in a small hotel there.

That hotel, incidentally, should be famous for one remarkable achievement. Company at the Civic Club was, naturally, rather mixed; and the hotel finally decided that the line must be drawn somewhere. On a certain day, therefore, just after admitting James Weldon Johnson, Secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, it barred out, because of his color, Lajpat Rai, who was not only a Hindu but a Brahmin.

Perhaps the focal point, geographically, of the Village was as near Greenwich Avenue and Eleventh Street as anywhere. The *Masses* first saw the light in an old stable which stood in what is now the middle of the southern extension of Seventh Avenue; and diagonally across from

it was Gallup's restaurant, of which, too, more later. But Henrietta Rodman herself, whom Floyd Dell, managing editor of the *Masses*, called the Egeria of the Village, in those days had her physical abode away over on the other side of town, near Stuyvesant Square. And some of the most ardent and tireless villagers I knew lived as far away as Croton-on-the-Hudson or somewhere in Connecticut.

It would be equally impossible to define the Greenwich Village I knew, and in which I played my own small part, by any criterion of social, artistic, or intellectual interests, aspirations, or theories. There was, in fact, a bewildering series of imperfectly interlocking and often merely impinging Villages, whose respective inhabitants as stubbornly refused to stay put as did the living wickets in the Queen of Hearts' croquet game.

There was the Village that seethed with social reform — single-taxers, Socialists of a dozen shades, anarchists philosophical and otherwise, syndicalists, I.W.W.'s, and simple champions of free speech. There was the Village of artistic turmoil with its futurists, post-impressionists, primitivists, and a very small group indeed who were just old-fashioned artists. There was the rabble of unpublished poets and novelists, unproduced dramatists, unheard musicians, and those who were grandly but vaguely self-described as merely 'living their own lives.' Probably the commonest answer, however, to the standard hailing-question of all the Villages, 'What do you do?' was 'I write'; or more modestly, 'I'm trying to write.'

Not that anything more was needed; it was, indeed, contrary to the Greenwich Village code of courtesy to press inquisition further. A heartless world might demand concrete evidence of accomplishment; but the mu-

tual charity of the Village made there, at least, acceptable the less exacting coin of professed aspiration. But in cataloguing the various eccentricities of the Village circles I must not forget the early Freudians and allied practitioners of various schools of ethical, mental, and even religious healing — nor, least of all, the Village of pure pose, since it was destined ultimately to swallow up all the rest.

#### IV

Through the midst of all this moved Henrietta Rodman, her square sturdy body erect in her flowing brown corduroy robes, her face, like an Indian sagamore's, framed in its straight black square-bobbed hair (in a day when bobbed hair for a woman was the ultimate proclamation of defiance of all convention), her beautiful and kindly eyes lighted by some subtle inner amusement; speaking less often than she listened, but then in her deep, throaty voice which had never quite lost its metallic Yankee clang, and which, when she chose, she could make ring like a temple gong. Always she moved serenely and assured, whatever tempests raged about her; yet always joyously ready on a moment's notice to catch fire in any cause, and to sit down then and there to help draft a manifesto or discuss with fervor 'the possibilities of group action.'

That last phrase, when wielded by Henrietta, was a conjuration of tremendous power. It was quite capable of sending her and her little band of ardent kindred spirits (of whom none more ardent than I!) off in seventeen successive different revolutionary directions in less

than twice as many weeks, only to move on to the eighteenth with undiminished — nay, with heightened — zeal.

Only two uncertainties, the belated product of much more mature years, obtrude themselves now upon my memories of that time when the salvation of all the earth was so simple and so joyous a matter. The first regards the tangible accomplishments, if any, of so much 'group action' in so many different directions. The second is concerned with the exact degree of seriousness with which, in her heart of hearts, Henrietta herself embraced any of these lofty but rapidly varied causes.

She was, after all, in one sense even less a professional Villager than I; for I took my duties as a *World* reporter far less seriously than she did her career as a teacher. The ringleader in all Village enterprises — the real founder of both the Liberal Club and the Civic Club; the crusader, among other things, at various times for freedom for India, justice for Ireland, equal rights for the Negro, removal of business disabilities from women, liberalization of the divorce laws, fair play for the Colorado miners and Paterson mill-workers, artistic freedom for Isadora Duncan, and re-election for Woodrow Wilson — was all these things strictly and solely outside of school hours. In her profession, and in all things touching her profession, like the teacher-mothers' agitation, she had no trace of the dilettante about her.

Henrietta Rodman was, in fact, one of the very few people I have ever known who really seemed to have worked out for herself a way of life that exactly suited her. I have known greater personalities who in this respect had far less success. She had a full life and a joyous one, in which, however little good the commotions



she dearly loved may have accomplished, she did an immense amount of good in quiet ways. I cannot believe that she ever knowingly did harm to any living soul; she was as completely selfless in her generosity as any human being can be; and I shall always count my own life the richer for having known her.

We need not, however, have looked very far, we pilgrims of the Ideal, if we had really wanted to face the unwelcome truth about the amount of attention paid to our activities by the world in general. For that vastly indifferent institution was perfectly epitomized by yet another Greenwich Village in our very midst — or, more accurately, in whose midst we ourselves existed.

This was a village remarkably like Irish Harlem; the Greenwich Village of completely ordinary folk — small business and professional men, skilled workmen in various trades, and employees in all grades and capacities of all manner of corporations, with their respective families. They lived their entirely ordinary, unexcited, and unexciting lives in that same area in which we throbbed and agitated and ran to and fro; in that region of small streets between Washington and Abingdon Squares, and from Twelfth Street down to Bleecker. They voted the straight Tammany ticket every election day; they outnumbered all other kinds of 'Villagers' ten to one; and they were not even sufficiently conscious of our existence to feel the need of ignoring us.

To be sure there were, on the wholly material plane, certain contacts. Utopia, when it comes, will still need drugstores; and in the meantime our custom was as welcome as anybody else's at Bigelow's. Even anarchists must eat, and pay for their food when they can, in that despicable substance known as money; and nearly all of

us came gradually to learn that in all the Village — nay, in all New York — there was no eating-place to compare with Gallup's.

## V

It occupied the ground floor of an old brick building in the narrow tip of the triangle made by Greenwich Avenue as it runs into West Eleventh Street — in those days Seventh Avenue stopped at Twelfth. Outwardly it was just one of the hundreds of struggling little restaurants that dot New York's side streets; a modest sign, windows with plain scrim sash curtains; inside none of the usual Village bizarrerie — not even a single futuristic drawing taken in lieu of cash payment for a meal — but clean, bare, painted, light blue walls, whitewashed ceiling and linoleum floor, plain deal tables and chairs but clean tablecloths and cloth napkins, and two waitresses in starched white aprons.

But it was the domain of one of the too-small company of the world's great-hearted and dedicated hosts. P. H. Gallup — 'Mr. Gallup' respectfully to his face, and 'Pa' Gallup, in deep affection, behind his back — as truly as Henrietta Rodman (whom he resembled in strikingly few other ways) had found his true place and mission in life. Yes; they were alike in just one other thing: their all-embracing generosity and kindliness.

'Pa' Gallup was a short and sturdy white-haired man, ruddy-faced as a host should be, with a huge and mock-ferocious white moustache, and a bright blue eye, alert and wary, like that of an experienced bantam rooster. And the soul within him was fearless and without guile, but of an infinite simplicity and gentleness.

All day long he was bustling to and fro between his kitchen, his cash desk at the end of the pie counter, and his queer-shaped little narrow dining-room. You needed to return to Gallup's but a single time to be recognized and greeted personally by the proprietor — and, I think, to establish then and there, did you need it, an amazingly elastic line of credit; though I personally cannot be sure about this, because I never had occasion to ask for it, and all such matters were handled with complete delicacy and kept sacredly confidential.

Across those tables in Gallup's the destiny of each of the seven arts, not to mention that of the whole fabric of organized society, was settled and unsettled a dozen times a day, without ever ruffling the tolerant composure of those tables' owner. I suspect it sometimes distressed him when, in our zeal, we drew lead-pencil diagrams upon his tablecloths; but I never knew him to protest. But let one of the disputants show the least sign of lack of interest in the food upon his plate — though it were food that both he and its purveyor knew he was not going to be able to pay for — and a distressed and anxious host would in two seconds be at his elbow.

And there was reason for 'Pa's' distress; for one who could summon no interest in the kind of food he served must indeed be in a poor way. Speak not to me of the little restaurants of Paris or Vienna, the magic kitchens of San Francisco or New Orleans. What can they know of feasting who have never ordered a tenderloin steak in Gallup's — thirty cents for a portion that narrowly missed completely hiding a dinner-plate from view, and must have been a good two inches thick? Ask Theodore Dreiser; he at least, I am sure, will remember; and so, too, may Helen Westley and a few other stray survivors.

And the great-hearted little man who thus, in the practical sense, provided nourishment for half the radical 'movements' of the Village was himself, as he made no bones of admitting when asked — though he never obtruded his views — a Free-Will Baptist from North Carolina, of the most Fundamental stripe, who had never in his life voted anything but the straight Democratic ticket, and who would, if pressed, state his profound conviction that Andrew Jackson was the greatest President the United States had ever had.

'But,' I remember asking him, when I had extracted these statements from him, 'aren't you shocked sometimes at the talk that goes on here in your own restaurant?' (As I recall it, that very day Henrietta, who was nothing short of Puritanical in her personal life, and who would leave the room if somebody started a smutty story, had been particularly vehement upon the problems of homosexuality.)

'Bless you, no,' said 'Pa' Gallup; 'I never hear any of it. It all goes in one ear and out the other; in one ear and out the other.' And so, I am afraid, it did with a great many more than 'Pa' — God rest his kindly soul!

The one drawback to Gallup's was that it was far too small for the real Village gatherings; especially when Henrietta bestirred herself in earnest to assemble her embattled following. When something really serious was in the wind we had to seek more room. It was for this reason that, among other enterprises, the Disgruntled Wives — one of Henrietta's most brilliant inspirations — foregathered at the old Chelsea, on Fifth Avenue at Twelfth Street, in the building that later was taken over by the Salmagundi Club.

The Disgruntled Wives were named, with an uncom-

fortably apt combination of accuracy and wit, by the husband of one of them. But Henrietta, as was her way, promptly seized upon the jeer and wore it as a badge of honor. The association — it did not have enough organization or even cohesion to be called a club — was the outgrowth of one of Henrietta's lesser crusades; an attempt to make the husband of one of her loyal followers behave himself.

The gentleman in question was a successful and wealthy medical specialist; and neither he nor his wife were exactly in their first youth. He prided himself, however, on his radical views, and liked to dabble in Village affairs, where he presently imbibed rather more than was good for him of various new gospels, with particular emphasis upon those that called for 'a new basis of sex relationships.'

Like more than one middle-aged husband of those times (and perhaps a few here and there both before and since), the Doctor placed such interpretation upon these doctrines as best suited his own convenience, and thence proceeded immediately to put them into practical application — a not remarkably original application, involving a damsel of considerably more tender years but seemingly no less liberal views than his; one of the type that gentlemen are supposed to prefer.

His wife, up to this point, had done her best to keep up with the radical's progress, and to accept philosophically what she could not remedy; but this proved more than either her philosophy or her own radicalism could endure. And with the same sure instinct that guided everyone who knew Henrietta Rodman, she brought her troubles to that unfailing fount of helpfulness.

One of the most delightful things about Henrietta was

the manner in which, while she talked and argued in terms of theoretical principle, her response to any concrete situation was invariably in terms of her own feeling toward the human individuals involved. She was quite willing to discuss free sex relations in the abstract; but let the husband of one of her own friends kick over the traces — that was different!

But being Henrietta, she could not rest content with consolation or even personal advice or action. She would have been quite capable of confronting the Doctor personally and telling him exactly what she thought of his conduct. But that was not enough. She must have 'group action.' So I presently found myself summoned to a conference to discuss plans for making the sinner see the error of his ways.

As a consultant I proved a peculiarly unfortunate choice. Like many another woman of my then far fewer years, I was by that time sure I understood men perfectly. I gave my counsel with a promptness and crisp certitude that — Henrietta herself being if possible rather more innocent than even I regarding male nature — unluckily carried immediate conviction. My plan was unanimously and even enthusiastically adopted.

It was, briefly, to co-operate in giving the Doctor the impression that his wife also had acquired an admirer. Make him jealous, said I in my best Dorothy Dix-Beatrice Fairfax manner. Let him realize that the wife he is neglecting is still an attractive woman, and sought after. He'll soon begin to worry; he'll realize that she means far more to him than any blonde cuties; he'll soon be coming back and trying to restore himself to her good graces. And when he does, said I impressively, she must be careful not to forgive him too easily or too soon.

I leave it to you if that wasn't, by all the authorities from Laura Jean Libbey onward, a perfect plan. Listen now to the tale of how it worked in practice.

At first all seemed to go swimmingly. The sufferer reported joyfully, after we had taken her out to dinner three times on evenings on which we had reason to expect that her husband would come home and miss her, and had sent her flowers once or twice (she herself insisted on paying for them from her household allowance), that he had demanded to know with whom she had been dining; and that she, carrying out our instructions, had smiled mysteriously and refused to tell.

Then one afternoon I arrived at Henrietta's apartment (playing hookey, on the Eddie Breker principle, from an assignment) and found her prostrate on the divan.

That very day the Doctor and his blonde had left for Hawaii on what he had tactfully described to his wife as a 'second honeymoon.'

As nearly as we, after long dispute, could puzzle it out, his reasoning had gone something like this. As long as his wife had nobody but himself, he owed it to her at least to stay within reach in case of emergencies, to provide for her and even to bestow upon her a residual share of his valuable society. But by convincing him that she, too, had found somebody else, we provided him with exactly the excuse he needed for following his own sweet inclinations.

My conceit of my knowledge of male nature then and there underwent a sudden and painful deflation — one from which it has never quite recovered. But if you think Henrietta was long cast down, you know very little of her resilient spirit. Within fifteen minutes or less she was again her erect and energetic self, and extracting

what for her was the lesson of the episode — a need for further, new, and better 'group action.'

'The trouble is,' she proclaimed, 'that none of us really do know anything about men — what they are actually like, objectively. Until we have some genuine knowledge of the masculine temperament, how can we possibly decide what form marriage should take in the future? What we need is a study group.' And then and there the association of Disgruntled Wives was born.

I, as was pointed out to me at least two or three times at every meeting, really wasn't eligible. Even Henrietta, in the reaction from the disastrous result of having followed my advice, was wont to snub me without mercy; but long before this I had proved myself so loyal and indispensable a satellite that she hadn't the heart to try to leave me out.

By and by, however, I think, all the actually disgruntled wives began to be glad to have me around. I served, indeed, a highly useful purpose; I gave each of them one person to whom they had a chance to assert superiority in martyrdom. So much of the meetings were given over to competition in tales of husband-inflicted injuries and masculine miscomprehension that it was a relief to have somebody to whom you could pour out your sufferings with no fear of having them promptly matched or over-matched.

We met once a fortnight for dinner and discussion in a private dining-room at the Chelsea. After dinner the waiters withdrew, the door was locked, and all present were summoned to renew their solemn oath never to reveal outside that room anything that might thereafter be said within it.

Never, as has been frequently pointed out, is a long,



long time. Since nearly a quarter-century has now gone by, in which far too many of that group have followed Henrietta on a farther quest than any we even discussed in that old time, it may be permissible to make a few qualified revelations of what actually went on in those Eleusinian Mysteries.

One night, for example, we had Lily Langtry as guest-speaker — the theory being that she had demonstrated a wide practical knowledge of male psychology — but all that I remember is that she denied having put the piece of ice down the Prince of Wales's (King Edward VII's) back.

'I would have, though, if I had thought of it,' she affirmed.

On another occasion somebody persuaded us, once and once only, to invite a male to address us. He was one of the early Village Freudians, but unlike most of them was actually supposed to have studied at the feet of the master, in Vienna. The theory was that he, a man and a psychologist, or at least a psychoanalyst, could tell us the very things we needed to know about the differences between the male and female psyche. But it didn't work out that way.

Finding himself privileged to stand alone and address some forty women, the man of wisdom yielded to an all too human or at least masculine impulse. His talk, which had commenced as an explanation by a man of male psychology, rapidly became a pronouncement by male wisdom of what we women were really like, and what was wrong with us. The results, and particularly for the lecturer, were not especially happy.

The Disgruntled Wives lasted longer than some others among Henrietta's brain-children; and their final dis-

solution was no fault of hers. The last touch was supplied by a would-be clever news story in the *Evening Sun*, chiefly disconcerting in its revelation that somebody had broken her promise and talked about the meetings. But the real, chief cause of their collapse was the incurable tendency for each and every meeting, despite all Henrietta's efforts to maintain orderly debate and direct it along constructive lines, to degenerate into a babble of '—— and do you know what he said yesterday?' — 'What do you think he did this very morning?' — 'Did you ever hear anything so outrageous?' — 'I do think it's a shame when he . . .,' — and so on, and so on, and so on.

Still, it was great fun while it lasted. In fact, of all Henrietta's 'groups,' enterprises, crusades, and miscellaneous movements, it is the only one I remember in which I think I should like to join again, if it could be revived today. And finally, it was another guest-speaker, a lady who shall be nameless here, whose speech was graced by what still seems to me the world's most magnificent opening phrase, far, far surpassing the classic "'Oh, hell!" said the Duchess.'

The lady in question, when the waiters had withdrawn and the door was locked, arose slowly to her feet — she was at the time quite obviously *enceinte* — crushed out her cigarette, looked us all quite calmly in the eye, and began:

'The first time I was unfaithful to my husband . . .'

## 8

# INTERNATIONAL INTRIGUE

### I

I DO NOT recall that any of us on the *World's* local staff, when the World War began, felt more than a tremendous but vague excitement about it. The stories of the rescue of American tourists from the warring countries, and the escape into American ports, with British cruisers on their heels, of German liners and sailing-ships, actually bulked larger in even New York's imagination than the thunder of the armies rushing onward to the Marne.

We made a brave attempt to go on as we had been going. Eddie Breker continued to hunt for Dorothy Arnold; I had one or two more unpleasant murder mysteries with which to deal, which would have been tremendous sensations a year or so earlier. But little by little the heart seemed to go out of it all.

Things kept on happening, outwardly, in much the same old way, and I do not believe one of us dreamed that we were actually seeing not only the death of the old order of the world, but also a much less important death

which, however, would affect our own lives far more nearly — the death of the old order in New York newspaper work; the passing, perhaps forever, of the days when a newspaper was a local institution, and with it of the kind of reporting that we had been trained to do and to regard as the greatest work life had to offer.

Even the war itself came home to us, at first, in the guise of local news — the fights over neutrality, the commotions raised by 'German-Americans,' the petitions to the President to embargo war munitions, and the ever-increasing and ever more sinister rumors of spies and sabotage. It was these last that brought me my last great mission for the *World*: a war story that was still a local assignment.

It was, if I remember, in the early summer of 1915 that I was called once more into conference in the managing editor's private office. I remember vividly enough how grave his face was; more serious than it had ever been on any previous assignment he had given me, and there had been tragic ones enough among them.

'We are going to offer you,' he said to me, 'a chance to undertake the most delicate, difficult, and important, and probably the most dangerous assignment you have ever undertaken for the *World*. But this time it won't be only for the *World*; you will have a chance to perform a service for your country.'

'You know how the rumors are steadily increasing regarding the extent and activity of the German spy organization in this country. British secret service men are making all sorts of accusations. We hear of German spies being introduced into the big munition factories to sabotage the machinery and even wreck entire plants if they can; of bombs to be planted in steamers carrying

ammunition for the Allies; of plans to dynamite bridges and even whole railroad terminals over or through which the munition shipments pass.

'Now here is where you may be able, if you are willing to volunteer, to help us land the biggest story in the history of the *World*, and at the same time to earn the thanks of the Government and of every patriotic American citizen.

'If this sort of thing is really going on — and we are convinced that it is — the German Ambassador himself must at least know about it, and the probabilities are that somebody on the Embassy staff is in active charge of the whole business. In fact, we already have fairly definite information indicating that Count von Papen, the military attaché, and Captain Boy-Ed, the naval attaché, one or both, are in the plot up to their necks.

'If we can get the goods on them, the President will send them both home at once; and if we get any real evidence that Count von Bernstorff himself is mixed up in it, even if only to the extent of knowing what is going on, he'll get his papers too. No telling what may come out of it; if this story really breaks, it may be big enough to throw the United States into the war on the side of the Allies.

'Now here's where you come in on this thing. For a long time Count von Bernstorff's favorite week-end and vacation spot has been the Gedney Farms Hotel, up near White Plains. We have a pretty good idea, too, what the attraction is. And practically every time he goes there, Boy-Ed and von Papen are along. We know all three of them will be there this coming week-end, and we hear that this time they may stay several weeks.

'They generally seem, when they're there, to relax and

enjoy themselves. They mix in with the other guests, and are probably more likely to be off guard there than they would be in Washington; besides, in Washington an outsider hasn't a chance to get near any of them.

'Are you willing — mind, this may be the most dangerous mission you ever undertook, and we're not assigning you, we're asking you to volunteer — are you willing to plant yourself at Gedney Farms, work your way into the crowd they run with, and do everything you can to get at least some clues for you to follow up, and at best perhaps break open the whole story?

'You'll have to cut loose from the office entirely. You may find yourself right in the middle of a swarm of German secret agents coming to report and get their orders; probably at the best of it there'll always be a few hanging around. They have a lot too much at stake to be chivalrous, and if they get at all suspicious, one girl's life, against the exposure and wrecking of their plans, won't be worth a burnt match.

'That's why there must be no letters and no telephone reports to the office. If you do gather anything we ought to know about, better come to town on a shopping trip — and be absolutely sure, before you even telephone the office, that nobody's trailing you.

'We'll try to keep an eye on you, quietly, while you're there. If things get really hot there may be some Department of Justice men in the background ready to go into action when needed — they'll know all about you. But at the best of it you'll be pretty much on your own; and you'd better set up an identity for yourself, beforehand, that will stand some investigation.

'Are you game to try it?'

## II

Was I game? Is a small boy game to go to the circus? Still, it was rather breath-taking when I thought it all over; and I went about my preparations a good deal more thoroughly, and in a much more serious frame of mind, than on most of my previous expeditions for the *World* into the land of make-believe.

Consequently, when Count von Bernstorff, Colonel Count von Papen, and Captain Boy-Ed arrived at Gedney Farms the following Saturday morning, all was prepared for them. Among the recent new arrivals was a Mrs. H. M. Hackett of Chicago. Perhaps — though in the light of subsequent events I incline to doubt it — one of them or one of their emissaries, took the precaution of scrutinizing the register in advance. Perhaps somebody even traced Mrs. Hackett back to the New York hotel which had recommended Gedney Farms to her as an attractive suburban resort for the hot weather. He could, if he wished, have traced her even farther — back to an apparently authentic Chicago address — without finding anything suspicious.

But if Mr. Jared Flagg had also chanced (as fortunately he didn't) to visit Gedney Farms that week-end, he would — but with no particular pleasure, probably — have promptly recognized the young and not-too-downcast widow, Mrs. Hackett of Chicago, as his whilom 'client,' Mrs. Mary Rand. And if his recognition had resulted in her being picked up a few days later in Long Island Sound, with a few bullets marked 'Made in Germany' judiciously distributed through her anatomy — why, that too, I am very much afraid, would have been quite all right with Jared.

But I didn't really worry very much about Jared Flagg. I did worry no little, and with better reason, over the possibility that any one of a great many people who knew me both personally and professionally might turn up any day at Gedney Farms, and hailing me quite innocently by my right name, ask me, in Count von Bernstorff's hearing, if newspaper work was still agreeing with me. That was, of course, just a risk that had to be taken. But at least, I told myself, to be spotted as a *World* reporter, though it would end my chances on the story, would also probably reduce the personal danger to me.

The Kaiser's under-cover men were not reputed to be much given to hesitation or moral scruple when things began to look a bit serious; and if Mrs. Hackett from Chicago seemed to be displaying a bit more inquisitiveness than they cared for, at any particularly inconvenient time for them, they might readily come to the conclusion that it would be just as well to be on the safe side and to remove Mrs. Hackett quite permanently. But, I reasoned for my own comfort — whether or not I did so correctly — if they learned that Mrs. Hackett was really a rather well-known New York newspaper woman, they would take particular pains to see to it that she didn't learn anything, but they would probably feel that it would be rather more risky to murder her than to leave her strictly alone.

All this and much more was spinning around inside my head that evening as I sat dining quietly alone at a wall table about two places away, and watched Count von Bernstorff and his two attachés unobtrusively enter the Gedney Farms dining-room and take the table reserved for them.



Thrills, like all the other really important things in life, happen inside of you. Nothing, outwardly, could have seemed more commonplace than the entrance and quiet seating of three gentlemen in impeccable evening clothes, without so much as a decoration among them. But I know my hands were cold and I think my face was hot from sheer excitement; and I know that very few episodes in my whole life are still as vividly present to me as the night I had my first good look at those three emissaries in my own country of Imperial Germany. I had come a long way, that night, from the skinny youngster taking her first ride alone on the 'L' on a cold February morning to get a job counting cigarette coupons!

I watched with a strained attention, which I concealed as carefully as I knew how, for the slightest sign of recognition or even exchange of glances between any of the three and any other diner, or even a waiter or bus-boy. At the same time I was keenly conscious of the three distinct personalities: Count von Bernstorff, little, dark, slender, almost insignificant-looking, with a tragically weary, anxious face; von Papen, the perfect type, pictorially, of the cold, pale-blond but steel-hard Prussian officer, and at the same time as loftily bored and aristocratically indifferent as any drugstore cat; Boy-Ed, who as they came in brought up the rear and fairly loomed above his two companions, big as the other two put together, dark, devil-may-care, and almost startlingly handsome.

It was not until dinner was almost over that anything whatever happened. Then a fresh chill ran up and down my spine; a bell-boy came in and addressed Captain Boy-Ed. With a low word to Count von Bernstorff he rose and hurried out. What could his errand be? Take

it easy, my child; this is no time for rushing headlong into trouble. Better to miss a trick or two at the start than get put out of the game too soon. It's probably a telephone call, and those two days before the Prussians arrived weren't by any means all wasted; I'm quite chummy with that telephone girl, and she's no German spy.

It was the right thought; next morning, sure enough, the telephone girl solved the Boy-Ed mystery for me — in disappointing fashion. I strolled casually by the switchboard and then drifted back for half an hour of aimless gossip. I knew exactly how to manage that. I had had long experience, at the Plaza, with bored and over-leisured ladies in search of somebody to talk with. It was the most natural thing in the world, in the midst of such a conversation, to remark on the presence of the three German diplomats, and to comment frivolously on the thrill the operator must get from handling all those official German messages. 'I suppose they're all in code and mean all sorts of big war plans,' said I in my most naïve manner.

'Gee, Mrs. Hackett, you've been reading too many spy novels,' said the telephone girl witheringly. 'The only one of the three of them that ever goes near a phone is Captain Boy-Ed, and all he ever uses it for is to call up his girl in Washington. He's engaged to a Miss Mackay-Smith that lives in Washington, and he calls her, or she calls him, on the long distance three or four times a day, every time he's up here. He was billing and cooing with her for half an hour right in the middle of his dinner last night. War plans, my eye!'

## III

This was a multiple disappointment. To begin with, if there were no mysterious telephone calls, that meant that no sinister secrets could be wormed out of them. Then a faint chill of a wholly different sort seemed to pass over me. Supposing even Prussian efficiency wasn't quite as all-embracing and as perpetually in operation as all of us, especially Boss Clarke, had assumed it to be! Supposing E. Phillips Oppenheim and Louis Joseph Vance really were guilty of slight exaggeration in their portrayals of the superhuman ruthlessness of the German spy machine — particularly of the hundred per cent assiduity with which its masters worked at their spying!

Supposing, concretely, that like the enterprising burglar in the intervals of burgling, the three German spy masters really had come to Gedney Farms for a complete vacation — from spying as well as everything else! What a mean trick; what an awful letdown that would be, for the *World* and me!

There was still another sense, too, in which the telephone girl's news was disappointing. A man who was as much engaged as Captain Boy-Ed appeared to be would hardly be promising material for the kind of campaign my superiors had mapped out for me. From the beginning, bearing in mind that I was taking all the risks of the game, I had considered myself entitled in return to whatever fun I might be able to get out of it. And from the first moment I had seen my three Prussians, I had picked out Captain Boy-Ed as by all odds the one likeliest to make the task of luring him to his destruction an entertaining one to the lurer. Now, right at the start, I found he was the only one I couldn't have!

Well, what must be must. Count von Papen was the second choice, and in any event was quite evidently the only one of the three who offered me any prospects. Sunday evening I came down to dinner prepared for direct frontal attack upon his susceptibilities.

The preparations had taken about an hour and a half. To begin with, I had supplemented my own hair, superabundant as it already was by present-day standards, with a rat and three puffs, piling the entire structure as high on my head as possible. Then I put on a black velvet evening gown of floor-sweeping length, with a slight train, and cut in a deep V in front and back. It was of pronounced hourglass shape; and inside it, to maintain that shape, I was laced to the limit of human endurance. To add a mysterious touch I wore no jewelry whatever; but twice around my neck, with trailing ends dangling down on each side, I had a filmy scarf of black tulle. I had definite plans for the employment of that scarf. I purposely delayed my own entrance into the dining-room until the three Germans were already seated, so that I might sweep regally past them, registering complete and conspicuous unawareness of their existence. But I hurried through my own dinner so that I could be leaving just when they were doing so.

Several times during dinner I detected Count von Papen's eye (by good luck he was seated facing me) turned in a hopefully inquiring gaze in my direction; and once or twice I permitted my own eyes just barely to brush over his. On these occasions I took care not to look entirely discouraging; but the amount of actual 'come-hither' in these fleeting glances couldn't have been more accurately or thriftily measured if I had employed a medicine-dropper.

Presently Captain Boy-Ed received his nightly summons to the telephone. A few minutes later Count von Bernstorff also rose and left the table. Count von Papen continued leisurely to sip his coffee, but it was plain that mere occasional momentary glances would not alone be enough to detain him much longer. I arose and began my own haughty departure; but as I passed him the trailing end of my scarf, by one of those lucky accidents that used quite inexplicably to happen now and then in those days of maidenly reserve, got itself caught in the back of Count von Papen's chair.

Of course I stopped instantly, startled and a thought dismayed; the Count, equally of course, sprang instantly to his feet, disentangled my scarf and bowed profoundly. I thanked him with distant sweetness — accurately measured equal portions of sweetness and distance — and went my way.

In the hotel parlors the usual Sunday evening concert was in progress. Count von Bernstorff was promenading, deep in conversation, with one of the guests whom I knew by sight and reputation — a lady quite prominent in New York society, and one of the last persons on earth to be suspected of international spy intrigues. (To put it cruelly, for such activities a certain irreducible minimum of brains is conceded to be needful.) Captain Boy-Ed was of course accounted for; he was talking with his fiancée. I found a chair and sat down to enjoy the music.

Presently, without any obtrusive haste, Count von Papen came strolling in from the dining-room. I watched his eyes go roving until they located me; after that they roved no more. But he was far too well-mannered to let his interest be conspicuous. He also promenaded for a

time, quite pointedly alone; and then found a chair not too near but also not too far from mine.

Deadly serious as the game was to me, by now I was beginning to enjoy myself; and especially to enjoy my own speculations as to what was going on inside his blond Prussian head. Had a European woman, or any woman at a European resort, permitted herself to appear as approachable as I had, he wouldn't have had a moment's hesitation in starting an open flirtation. But this was America. Perhaps he had already learned that I was (supposedly) from Chicago; and he might well have been warned that manners there were still freer than in the East.

Quietly studying his colorless immaculateness and his not totally unattractive combination of polished manners with complete and lordly self-assurance, I found myself thinking of the things just such men as this were credibly reported to have done to helpless folk in Belgium and Northern France. I remembered, too, that this very man was believed to be the directing head of a murderous gang of terrorists. And yet I thought he might already have had to listen to a Prussian lecture or two on the danger of mistaking American freedoms for flirtatiousness, and the duty of avoiding offense to the people among whom he was supposed to be serving in a diplomatic capacity. It was rather like planning to keep a leopard guessing; but it was the game I had come to Gedney Farms to play.

Next morning play began in the resort's annual tennis tournament — mixed doubles. Everybody came to look on: Count von Bernstorff and the lady to whom he had been so attentive the night before; Mrs. Hackett of Chicago; and Count von Papen, still hopefully devoting

himself to the enterprise of trying to catch Mrs. Hackett's eye. And once again he had just enough success to preserve him from discouragement; and an even more carefully measured portion of friendliness in each *quasi*-accidental glance.

Just once, indeed, I let matters go a trifle farther. The couple playing at the moment on the side nearest our seats were not doing very well. Even I could see that their teamwork was spectacularly and ludicrously bad. Presently they both dashed madly and blindly for the same shot, bumped into each other and went down in a tangle of wildly waving arms and legs, from the midst of which a racket, either wrenched out of its owner's hand or hurled in blind fury, went flying into the net.

For a second the spectacle was irresistibly comical; and Count von Papen, even while he laughed, adroitly managed to catch my eye at just the right moment so that even to myself I seemed for a second or two to be joining with him in a common mirth.

That afternoon, when I came out to watch more tennis, neither Count von Bernstorff nor his lady friend was in evidence; but there sat Count von Papen in the very seat I myself had occupied in the morning. As I came down the aisle he leaped to his feet to make room for me; and the next moment I heard a low voice in English the barest trifle too precise, saying:

'Really, Mees-es 'Ackett, must fellow-guests be always so distant and so formal?'

Evidently my bold Count had finally decided that some things must mean the same in America that he had generally found they did in Europe, and had made up his mind to try his luck accordingly.

## IV

If any faun ever managed to appear quite as startled as I immediately did, it must have been a faun of unusual histrionic gifts. Still, I did succeed in conveying to the Count the impression that he hadn't been wrong to a fatal extent; and apparently he found no difficulty in explaining my timorous confusion as an involuntary tribute to his irresistible combination of title, official and social position, and personal appeal. So the awkward moment passed, and we were presently chatting quite as cosily as ever had I and any of my previous victims or near-victims.

The week that followed would have been a wholly delightful one, if it hadn't been for a certain uncomfortable feeling at the back of my neck (a sort of burning sensation, as though the merciless eyes of fifteen or twenty German spies, waiting in the background for my affable companion to tell them whom they were to murder next, were focused there).

Count von Papen was, after all and at least, a man of the world and of inborn social traditions. He knew far more than many better and cleverer men than he have known of the art of making himself agreeable to a lady. He seemed entirely willing to take me at my own valuation and indeed to accept my informality as mere Chicagoan innocence — I found myself wondering sometimes whether the handsome Turk, his comrade Boy-Ed, would in the same circumstances have been as easily managed. As far as outward evidences went he had absolutely nothing on his mind save the enjoyment of his holiday in the pleasant company his lucky star had thrown his way.



But whether or not he had anything on his mind, I had plenty on mine. I was doing my faithful best, every day, to carry out my assignment. I did manage, in the intervals of auto rides, tennis and golf (both of which we both played atrociously), and dancing each evening (at which we did much better), to keep a fairly close check on nearly everybody with whom any of the three men had any visible contact; but all with absolutely no result.

If there really were any German spies in what you might call active practice anywhere around Gedney Farms just then, I was soon convinced that they were too well hidden and too subtle for me. I couldn't locate so much as a suspicious quiver of an eyelash. I confirmed the fact that none of them except Captain Boy-Ed ever went near the telephone, and he only to commune with his lady-love. Nobody, least of all the three perilous Prussians, seemed even to have heard that there was a war going on.

During the entire week I came across just one clue — a tiny scrap of paper torn from a pocket detachable memorandum-pad, which I picked up surreptitiously after Count von Papen had carelessly dropped it. It had on it nothing but a street address in the Bronx, scribbled in pencil; but since it was all I had, I dutifully relayed it to Boss Clarke — and groaned in spirit when he told me he would put Eddie Breker on it. The results were exactly what I expected; Eddie 'investigated' and 'watched the premises' and was still investigating and watching when the big sensation came — which we're coming to in a moment now. As I recall it, the Department of Justice men eventually found a cache of rifles there, but too late to make the discovery of much importance to anybody.

But I had been told that the *World* didn't expect results from me right away, and wouldn't worry if they didn't hear from me even for three weeks. I still had plenty of expense money (though I could have used a few more dinner-gowns and things when Count von Papen really began to advocate seriously and in thorough-going fashion the Teutonic equivalent of going places and doing things). I settled down to make it a campaign.

After a while, however, I began to wish more and more ardently that I could persuade the Count to take a little more interest in the war. Beyond telling me — obviously in the sincere belief that he was bestowing the uttermost in compliments — that I could pass anywhere for a true German girl, or perhaps asking me what I considered the nearest English equivalent to *liebchen*, national or political subjects had no part in his conversation. He put aside my own carefully calculated and seemingly frivolous comments or queries as to the meaning of this or that piece of war news, with what I thought at the time were altogether too deftly vague replies. Still I persevered...

The *World's* exposure of the German propaganda campaign in the United States, and of the German spy and sabotage plots in this country, is one of the classic sensations of newspaper history. If there ever was a bigger single news 'beat' scored by one newspaper exclusively, I can't think what it was. For several days that exposure, published in New York, overshadowed all the news from the battle-fronts, and even in Paris and London rivaled the actual fighting in the prominence of its display.

That publication of the authentic secret reports and instructions of the German agents so deeply implicated Count von Papen and Captain Boy-Ed that President Wilson handed them their passports. For a time it looked as though Count von Bernstorff's own position were none too secure. Without a doubt the *World's* publication of that story had its part in the sequence of events that carried America into the war, with all that this has meant to subsequent history.

Not long after that story was published A. Bruce Bielaski, Chief of the Bureau of Criminal Investigation of the Department of Justice, came up from Washington especially to offer a job in his bureau to the *World's* most celebrated woman reporter and investigator; and he and 'Bill' Flynn, who was then head of the United States Secret Service, and whom I already knew quite well, spent nearly two hours vainly trying to persuade me, as a patriotic duty, to become a Government agent.

What a triumph it would have been — but for one little detail!

That one little detail was that I had, from first to last, not one single solitary thing to do with the actual landing of that whole enormous newspaper sensation. My ten days at Gedney Farms with Count von Bernstorff, Count von Papen, and Captain Boy-Ed didn't add one lonely line of type to the *World's* exposure of their iniquities.

So far as anybody knows there wasn't ever a single German secret agent at any time within twenty miles of Gedney Farms. And when Count von Papen replied with what I had thought such deft vagueness to all my questions about the war, it was, if Captain von Rintelen, one of the confessed German spies, is to be believed,

merely because Count von Papen knew, if anything, rather less about what was going on than I did.

After all my trailing and spying and eavesdropping, my allurements, and my blandishments, the *World* actually landed the whole story, while I was in the very midst of my act, because Dr. Heinrich Albert, Counselor of the German Embassy, carried a brief-case full of highly incriminating papers with him into a New York elevated train, and then, like any absent-minded New York business man, got off the train and left it behind him on the seat; and the man who found it brought it to the *World* office. And that, I have always been assured, was absolutely all there was to it.

Of course it doesn't matter much now, to me or to anybody else. Still, I do have one regret. I wish I had only known, while I was still at Gedney Farms, that I was, once again, merely being cast by my romantic superiors for the rôle of an Oppenheim heroine in real life, and that it was, even more than the Flagg case, all only gorgeous make-believe. I could have had so much more fun out of it!

# 9

## STIRABOUT

### I

FOR all that, there is really little if any larger a proportion of make-believe (save in the romantic hearts of newspaper folk) in actual newspaper work than in most of the rest of the business of life. Most of it, as I recall it now, was pretty real; in fact all too real, and often enough, as only real things dare to be, incredible.

The things that newspaper folk see happen — and surprisingly frequently, happen to themselves — are not always easy to tell about. But they are more easily told about than believed; and when it comes to explaining them —

In the quiet little mountain town of Monticello, in Sullivan County, New York, twenty-five years ago, lived a highly respectable and universally respected lawyer named, as I recall it — though the name no longer matters — Couch. He was at this time well past sixty years of age; had been married, to all outward seeming happily, for many years; and in every way stood well in his community.

He presently experienced the further good fortune of a swift, easy, and quiet death, in his own home, from heart

disease; and was duly followed to his grave by his friends and neighbors, who included practically all the solid citizenry of the little town.

After the funeral his executors assembled in the little frame building which for thirty years he had used as an office, and set about going through his papers and preparing to put his affairs in order. But as they worked they began to be troubled by a curious whining, whimpering sound from somewhere, which none of them could either trace or identify. Their first idea was that it came from a dog penned up under the building, or a cat which had gotten locked up in one of the filing-cases.

The weird sound persisted, and began to get on their nerves; so much so that they finally abandoned their work and set themselves in earnest to search the entire place until they found its origin. They ransacked the whole room, but still with no result.

Finally one of them noticed that the sound seemed louder near the rear wall; and fumbling along the book-cases, which lined that wall higher than a man's head, suddenly discovered that one section of them swung out on hinges. Behind that section was a door; and now the whimpering sound was clearer than ever. They crowded together, mustered their courage, and opened the door.

Within a sort of lean-to, which outside had been joined so unobtrusively to the office structure that none of them, as they suddenly realized, had ever before noticed its existence, was a bare room, or rather cell — for it was not ten feet square — windowless; save for the one opening, doorless; and smelling like a dog-kennel. In it, for sole furniture, was a cot; and on the cot, clothed only in rags, with matted gray hair half hiding her face, lay a woman.

Speechless and wild-eyed she stared up at them; they

stared at her and at each other. One of them spoke to her; asked her such questions as he could summon in his bewilderment — her name; what she was doing here. She answered slowly, haltingly, in a confused, rambling, and incoherent mutter that offered nothing to the purpose. Not a man there recognized her or could remember ever having seen her before.

When I reached Monticello the next day — I had been assigned to the story the moment the first despatch from our local correspondent arrived, and the office had leaped instantly to the notion that, wild as it might seem, perhaps Dorothy Arnold had been found — the poor waif was in the hospital, and had been restored to some measure of outward decency of appearance. One glance was enough to make sure that it was not Dorothy. This was a woman at least fifty years old.

Her face was vacant, her speech barely intelligible, and she was confused by all but the very simplest questions. I was permitted to try, for a little while, to talk with her, but it was useless; she did not know her own name, or even, seemingly, what the question meant. The physicians and nurses assured me that no one else had obtained anything coherent from her.

A few of the older townsfolk, brought in to see her, believed or professed to believe that they recognized her as a woman who had for a short time worked as Couch's secretary — thirty years before! For more years than anyone could definitely remember, the lawyer had had neither secretary, partner, nor assistant; no person could be found willing to say when, if ever, within ten years or more, he had seen anyone resembling the unknown abroad in Monticello. Nobody even remembered noticing the lean-to that had hidden her, or could say whether

it had been part of the original structure or had been added later; and if so, at what time. Nobody remembered who had built the office in the first place; it was generally assumed that it was the work of some contractor who had long since died or moved away. It finally came to be the accepted belief in Monticello that for at least nine years, and probably far longer, the woman must have been kept continuously hidden in that place.

As in duty bound, I went and looked at that hiding-place for a human creature. I described it for my paper as accurately and completely as I could. But no description could ever be adequate to the horror which even yet the mere thought of it brings upon me.

Some few details were gradually pieced together from the poor soul's rambling talk, which gave some idea of her existence during those nine — or ten, or none knows how many more — years. Winter and summer, she had remained locked in that almost airless room from eight in the morning, when Couch opened his office, until six at night, when before going home he swung back the bookcase, opened the door, and permitted her the added freedom of the office, whose door he locked on the outside. She was permitted no artificial light of any kind, and in the hospital showed fear of it.

He brought her food — smuggled scraps from his own table — in the morning, and sometimes again late at night, and water; and, at long intervals, odds and ends of discarded clothing, presumably his wife's, with which to cover herself. Save for this her life was literally that of a caged animal. She had not so much as a comb or brush.

To this day not the faintest clue to her name or previous history, nor to the manner in which she became the respectable country lawyer's captive, has ever been



found. The man's papers were examined piece by piece; not a line ever came to light even remotely suggesting any explanation, nor even an allusion to the woman whom for so many years he had kept concealed within ten feet of the desk at which he conferred daily with his friends and clients.

## II

All that can be said is that this is a thing that happened; and by happening compels us to place it also, with war and great music, the throwing away of one's own life to save another's, and the kidnaping and murder of a baby, within the range of human behavior. Still, it was a thing for which it is at least possible to fashion some sort of credible or at least plausible explanation, though we shall never know whether or not that explanation is true.

The explanation which some of the newspapers proffered in their headlines by calling the elderly foundling a 'love slave' was of course fantastically silly. But a possible clue has occurred to me from stories I have heard of the attitude, many years ago, of many people in the rural districts of New England toward insane or mentally defective members of their own families.

I have been told that they combined with an ingrained horror of the insane asylums of that day (a horror only too terribly merited) a deep feeling of personal disgrace which caused them to go to any lengths to conceal the existence of such an unfortunate in their own family circle. Fifty or seventy-five years ago, it is said, the barred cell, hidden in a remote corner of a barn or outbuilding, for the family 'natural' was no uncommon part of the

fittings of a farm. It seems possible that the Monticello lawyer had grown up in such an atmosphere, and that the woman he hid away so carefully and so long was a near relative — perhaps even his own sister.

Right or wrong, I submit this as a possible explanation. But there are many things within my own newspaper experience for which I have never been able to find any explanation at all.

There was, for instance, a not at all uncommon phenomenon of newspaper work of my day; I don't know whether or not it still persists, but see no reason why it shouldn't, however greatly the conditions of news-gathering have changed and are still changing. It was a thing whose existence we all recognized and not one of us in the least understood — the workings of what we called the 'nose for news.'

Perhaps somebody can tell me, for example, why Martin Green, whom I knew on the *Evening World*, but who before that had been the ablest reporter in St. Louis, was seized one sultry afternoon with an inexplicable impulse to climb to the top of the tall sight-seeing tower which had originally been built as part of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition.

I have heard Martin tell the story, and he took pains to explain that he had known at the time that it was a foolish thing to do in that wilting heat, but that he could not resist the impulse — it is perhaps better to say that he could not disobey the call that had come to him.

He reached the sightseeing platform at precisely the right moment to see, as though at his very feet, the long black finger of a tornado reach down from the sky and in one mighty sweep trace its mark across the city; a mark some ten miles long and a hundred yards wide, in which

when it had been made nothing stood, nothing moved, and nothing lived.

Any competent meteorologist can explain the tornado for you. But the thing that saw to it that there should be, in the one spot in all St. Louis from which its vast destruction would be completely visible, the one man in that city best equipped and trained to watch it with steady eyes and write clearly what he had seen — that has not yet been explained to me.

It was my privilege to work for several years under the immediate direction of a man who had, I think, a larger share of this uncanny faculty, this seeming ability to pick coming events out of the air, than any other newspaper man I've ever known — and I've known some brilliant men in my time. This was our 'Boss' Clarke; Arthur Clarke, city editor and later assistant managing editor of the *World*.

One day in late April of 1916 Boss Clarke strolled out into the Art Department. At that time all the interest, so far as the war was concerned, was and for some time had been focused on the tremendous struggle around Verdun. The rest of the western front was apparently completely quiescent.

'I want a map to run a week from Sunday,' he told Frank Drake, our art director — the same Frank Drake who four years later, in the dark days of 1920, organized and led the first Anti-Prohibition Parade. I wonder how many of the triumphant Repealers of 1932 remember it?

'I want to show this section right here,' said Boss Clarke, and pointed to a region where there hadn't been any fighting worth mentioning since the early days of the War — a swampy and uninteresting neighborhood west and north of the little city of Peronne on the river Somme.

That map was duly published two weeks later; and nobody in the office knew why. On Monday morning they found out. Boss Clarke had laid his finger on the precise area which, the very day his map was published, became the scene of the mightiest effort so far made by the British in the War; the opening attack of what is known in history as the 'Battle of the Somme.'

Perhaps you will say that by assiduous reading of all the despatches, picking up a hint here and a hint there, with possibly some private advices from men who had means of knowing what was going on, Boss Clarke had put together a rational clue to what was coming. Well, perhaps so — though if ever any secret was ever guarded by any War Office with desperate and jealous care, it was the time and place of the next 'big push.' But if so, try this:

If I remember rightly, it was along in January, 1915, that Boss Clarke had one of the worst attacks of restlessness from which I ever saw him suffer. Usually he was the most patient and considerate of men; but for a while nothing could please him. Then, abruptly, he summoned Walter Scott Meriwether and gave him peremptory orders to take, that very afternoon, the Old Dominion boat to Newport News. I completely forget what the assignment was, but I know that it seemed so flimsy and unimportant an excuse for sending a man all the way to the Virginia Capes that Meriwether himself could hardly believe his ears. However, when Boss Clarke told you to go, you went.

Fully to appreciate the circumstances, you must know that Walter Meriwether's forte was stories of the sea. He had once served in the United States Navy, and had a thorough seaman's knowledge of the sea and of ships,

and of seafaring language. Nautical yarns were 'his meat.'

At six o'clock the following morning Walter Meriwether, disembarking at the pier under the lee of Fortress Monroe, happened, seaman-like, to cast a weather eye to seaward. His whole attention was caught instantly by a most extraordinary-looking craft that was limping in toward the anchorage in Hampton Roads.

She had been, apparently, a passenger liner; but now she was painted warship gray, and this in turn was heavily streaked and stained with rust. Her top-hamper was a wreck; and on her forecastle and along her sides at intervals were plainly to be seen the long lean muzzles of good-sized Krupp guns. And at her gaff she flew the white, red, and black-crossed naval ensign of Imperial Germany.

That strange craft was the German auxiliary cruiser and commerce destroyer *Prinz Eitel Friedrich*, transformed by her own crew from a peaceful passenger liner into that warlike guise; and she had run into Hampton Roads to take refuge in an American port after sinking French and British shipping and dodging British cruisers halfway around the world.

Her story was the first of that amazing series of sagas of sea adventure created during the war by the exploits of German seamen; and Walter Scott Meriwether, a sailorman himself, was the first newspaper man to see her, to board her and interview her captain and officers, and to secure photographs of her and of some of her exploits and victims.

Now, since the *Prinz Eitel Friedrich* had been continuously at sea from the moment the declaration of war found her out in the far reaches of the Pacific, and had

been unseen or unheard of for at least two months — was not even known to have slipped around into the Atlantic — please tell me just what it was that impelled Boss Clarke to have, of all the men on his staff, Walter Meriwether and no other at the precise spot and at the precise moment he needed to have him in order to get that story.

### III

I had my own personal experience with that weird sixth sense of Boss Clarke's; and it was one I have no difficulty whatever in remembering.

I had been sent to Boston to dig into a queer and rather sordid story — a jewel robbery in a wealthy and socially highly placed family, in which all the clues presently proved to point with distressing persistence straight at a certain scapegrace son-in-law of the house.

The family's social connections made the story potentially important enough to draw four or five other New York reporters, besides myself, to Boston. But it proved to be that most annoying type of case to good reporters who really enjoy their work — a story in which you are perfectly sure of your facts but don't dare print any of them.

Not one of us, after working a day on the case, doubted the son-in-law's guilt; nor do I doubt it today. As a matter of fact, that was only the first of a series of closely similar ventures on his part, in which, far later than it should, the law eventually caught up with him. But though we tried every expedient we could think of, we were utterly unable, on this first occasion, to put together

a story it would have been safe to publish. Every experienced reporter learns very soon the difference between moral proof and legal proof; and not only he but his editors also soon acquire a healthy respect for the institutions known as libel laws.

It was no pleasant task, either, to attempt to break down that young wife's staunch adherence to her worthless husband's cause. As long as she stood by him, we had no story; and she stood by him to the finish. At the end of some four days we all reported by long-distance telephone to our respective chiefs that the story could not be printed; we had no legal proof, and it was too dangerous. And in five cases out of six the city editor heaved a sigh and said, 'All right, come on home.'

My case was the sixth. I was the last to report — on a story like that, away from home, we New York reporters always flocked and worked together — and when I did so, I already knew that all the others had been called in. In fact I mentioned this to Mr. Clarke, in the vain hope that it would influence him.

But it didn't. He kept me waiting for a long, silent minute, and then said slowly: 'Well, I suppose it's no use. But I think you'd better stay over just one day more. Try just once more, tomorrow; and then if nothing breaks, come on in.'

When the others learned that they must leave me behind, there was much sympathy for me, and even more indignation against my hard-hearted boss. I saw them all off on one of the evening trains, and then dragged my own lonely, weary, and disgusted way back to the old Parker House, wondering what on earth I could find to do tomorrow, to 'break' the story, that I hadn't tried already; 'and so to bed.'

At half-past one that morning I found myself sitting bolt upright and terrified in my bed in a pitch-black room. I had been awakened out of a sound sleep by cold water dripping on my face.

I scrambled out of bed, snapped on the light, and seized the telephone. The Parker House had no night operator, but after a long wait the night clerk answered. Among all the remarkable statements that have ever impinged upon my eardrums, the one he made, in prompt answer to my complaint, ranks near the top.

'It's all right, lady; it's all right,' said he cheerily. 'A lady has just been murdered in the room right over you!'

That was the second of three occasions in my reporting days on which I think my heart actually and literally stopped beating. Fortunately — all three times — it went on again. And this time it had only taken two or three fresh beats before I remembered who I was, and my duty to my paper.

My window was wide open. Outside was the fire-escape; if the murderer had used it, he was probably gone by now. But I slammed and locked it with one hand while grabbing my stockings with the other. In perhaps two minutes or less I was out in the dimly lighted corridor, clothed in some disorderly fashion, and hurrying, on legs which I could not quite keep from trembling, to the spot where there was a story for the *World*.

It wasn't a murder, after all, but a suicide. A Mrs. Crowninshield, wearer of a proud name on Beacon Hill, had slipped away from her home, poor lady, unknown to all her family, and had chosen a room in the Parker House as the quietest and least troublesome place she could think of in which to die.



In her disorder and desperation she had filled the bathtub with water, and then, leaving it running, had shot herself in such a way that she would fall backward into the water. Naturally the water, overflowing, had soaked through the floor; and it was this that had awakened me. And I was there to be wakened because once more that queer prescience of a great city editor had placed one of his reporters — and, again, probably the very one he would deliberately have chosen — in the exact spot in which she needed to be in order to secure a triumph (a minor one and a sad one, to be sure) for the *World*. For I was in time to telegraph a fairly complete account of the whole tragic affair to my paper before its final edition of that same morning had gone to press. We not only were the only New York paper to print the story at all that same morning, but we actually had a better and more complete account than the Boston morning papers had.

But my own nerves didn't recover for a long time from that night clerk's peculiar method of reassuring me. In spite of all the tight places I have been in, and all the distinctly unpleasant people it has been my lot to meet professionally, I can, I repeat, only remember three occasions on which I was really scared, of which this was the second. I have already told about the first — that night on the station platform at Point Pleasant. The third experience, to draw possibly too fine a distinction, was actually more horrible than it was terrifying; and yet it was the only one of the three in which I was in real danger.

Roland B. Molyneux, convicted poisoner, was one of the very few persons who have entered the death-house at Sing Sing and yet lived to walk the streets again in

open daylight as free men. He had written a play, based more or less on his own experiences, which he called 'The Man Inside.' It was, incidentally, wretched stuff. Then he had married his own secretary. The announcement of his marriage caused the *World* to send me to interview him.

He met me at the head of the stairs outside the apartment he and his bride had taken.

'Mr. Molyneux,' I began — and stopped. I could do nothing but stand frozen, clutching the stair-rail, looking into his eyes.

It was wholly his eyes — the grotesque and horrible change I saw come into them. One moment they were the eyes of a tired, wary, and rather unfriendly human being; but still of a human being. Next moment they were — but I do not know what they were; and I can certainly find no words in which to describe them. For perhaps two ticks of the watch we both stood there; then . . . it was almost a relief when, yelling as not even a beast could yell, he leaped straight at me, clutching, clawing, and striking with both fists.

How I got down those stairs — how I got out of that house still living — I don't to this day know. All I remember clearly is finding myself lying in a tumbled heap at the foot of the stairs, while above me a maniac was yelling, whistling, and gibbering. I got to my feet somehow, and fled.

That night Roland B. Molyneux was taken to an asylum for the violently insane, in which, a short time later, he died.

## IV

As queer as anything about that episode, perhaps, was my own reaction to it. Irresponsible and superstitious youngster that I was, I carried around with me for a long while afterward a secret conviction that Molyneux had been the unconscious instrument of a vicarious retribution visited upon me for a particularly graceless exploit of my own a week or so before.

There had been a murder in some little Hudson River town — I forget which. We used to make a great to-do in the news about mere single-person murders in those days, before the War — and Prohibition — and mile-a-minute motor cars on the open road — came along to correct, with wholesale slaughter, our sense of proportion in these matters.

The chief suspect on this occasion was a bargeman; a member of that highly individual community who live their lives on the canal boats going to and fro on the Hudson and the Barge Canal, over all the miles and in all the ports from New York to Buffalo.

Word came to the *World*, in what we optimistically believed to be an exclusive tip, that this man was on board a certain barge which at the moment was anchored off Mariners' Harbor, Staten Island. Just why I was assigned to find and interview him, I don't know. Perhaps the theory was that a bargeman's well-known chivalry would protect me better than it might an over-inquisitive male investigator

However that may have been, I presently arrived at Mariners' Harbor, and located the barge I sought. It lay fairly close to the shore, but at some distance from the nearest pier. Fortunately, on that pier I encountered

a vast and rubicund person who proved to be the owner (or at least asserted that he was owner) of a row-boat. To him I offered five dollars if he would row me out to the barge.

For a moment, I think, he was in grave danger of swallowing his eatin' tobacker. But he presently managed to gulp out an acceptance of my offer — I know now that he would have regarded fifty cents as enormous pay. Five minutes later I was scrambling hand over hand up a perpendicular ladder to the canal boat's deck, while my gigantic boatman looked delicately in other directions (at least he was doing so each time I looked back over my shoulder at him, and I hope he did continuously). And in the barge's cabin I found — one of nature's noblemen.

He was, indeed, actually the man for whom we all, newspapers and police, had been looking; but not two minutes' conversation with him was needed to convince me that he was as totally innocent of murder as he later proved in court to be. No more essentially harmless creature ever walked the earth (or rather did not walk the earth), since virtually his entire life was spent on the waters of the Hudson and the 'raging canawl.'

His chief ornament and pride was one of those gigantic and ferocious moustaches, far blacker than Nature ever dared to make them, which you used to see on 'crayon enlargements' in the front parlor — usually on the portrait of Uncle Dan, who was a captain in the Volunteer Fire Department, and had the name of being something of a devil with the women. And it was soon evident that my host's bosom nourished a conviction that in this latter respect Uncle Dan had nothing whatever on him.

He was far from being either flattered or disconcerted at being interviewed by a reporter — even by a 'lady re-

porter' — but showed not merely courtesy but a touchingly solicitous willingness to tell me everything I could possibly wish to know regarding his entire life history. And as the interview prolonged itself he inquired:

'Might I offer you a cup of tea, ma'am?'

I had accepted the invitation in the spirit in which it was tendered, and the tea-kettle was beginning to simmer on his little cook-stove, when we heard a couple of bumps alongside, a scramble on the ladder, and the vast red face of my boatman appeared like a full moon in the companionway.

'There's a young felly out here just come aboard, ma'am, an' says he's a reporter,' he rumbled. 'What'll I do wid him?'

It is, of course, no excuse whatever to say that I was a reckless youngster who cared for nothing and nobody on earth save my paper, and who thought of nothing then or ever save getting and guarding a story for the *World*.

Without a second's thought I answered, 'Oh, chuck him overboard.'

My boatman's face disappeared. Next moment a yell of rage and dismay was followed by a resounding splash alongside. Never had I dreamed that it was within the power of five dollars to purchase such unquestioning loyalty and instant obedience. I felt remarkably like Aladdin the first time he rubbed the lamp.

'It's all right, ma'am,' said my host calmly. 'It's only three feet deep alongside. All he's got to do is to wade ashore.' And just then the tea-kettle boiled.

When I finally returned to the office, very late that afternoon, Boss Clarke silently handed me a clipping from the *Evening Sun*. I read it with highly mixed feelings, and with my face aflame.

The story was told in the clumsy third person we used in those days, when you won the privilege of signing a story only once in a blue moon. But it was plain that it had been written by a young man who at the time was feeling very much abused and deeply sorry for himself. It recounted the perils and adventures of an *Evening Sun* reporter on the trail of the Haverstraw (or Rhinecliff, or wherever it was) murder suspect.

The first thing about it that excited my resentment was that it sought to convey the impression that it had been solely by superior sleuthing ability that this reporter had discovered that the sinister individual in question was concealed on a barge lying off Mariners' Harbor; when it was perfectly evident that his paper had gotten a tip from the same source from which the *World's* hint had come, and there never had been any concealment on the part of my friend the bargee, anyway.

But worse was to come. By a further exercise of his great enterprise and daring, it seemed, the *Evening Sun* reporter had obtained a row-boat and laid himself alongside the perilous barge; only to discover that the 'suspect' (the copy-reader, probably, had saved him from saying 'murderer') was guarded by two still more sinister accomplices, of whom one was a woman.

This vicious and abandoned creature, the moment the reporter gained the barge's deck, had ordered the third ruffian to throw him overboard. Her command had been instantly obeyed, and the daring youth had barely escaped with his life.

After long and anxious self-communion I decided that my safest course was completely to ignore this painfully interesting tale. With a mouth in which no butter could possibly have melted, I sat down and wrote my own de-

mure and entirely accurate (as far as it went) report of my interview with my friend and host, the bargeman.

## V

Unluckily, next morning's *Sun* published simultaneously a complete and equally accurate account of the entire day's doings at Mariners' Harbor, specifically mentioning the young lady reporter from the *World* as sole cause of the downfall of the young gentleman reporter from the *Evening Sun*. And from the style in which this story was written I, and every other newspaper man or woman in New York, instantly recognized the handiwork of the one and inimitable Frank Ward O'Malley.

How Frank had ferreted out the truth, I don't know. I suspect that some co-worker betrayed me over a highball glass in Lipton's or some other Park Row oasis of those unregenerate days. There it was, at any rate, for all the *World* to see.

Boss Clarke never said a word to me about it then or later; but for a week or so, whenever his eye rested upon me I seemed to detect an extra twinkle in it.

That story was typical of Frank O'Malley and of the unique position he then occupied. The *Sun* in those days was the newspaper man's newspaper; or rather, in a sense was hardly a newspaper at all. Perhaps in Dana's time it had still been in some respects interested, or had pretended to be, in the normal duty of a daily newspaper; but in these declining years of Dana's successor, Laffan, of which I am writing, it had become something I can perhaps faintly indicate by saying it was like a dim foreshadowing of the *New Yorker*, disguised as a daily news-

paper because it had not, like the *New Yorker*, the full courage of its detached and sardonic convictions.

To call Frank O'Malley, as he called himself, a reporter was absurd. He cared little or nothing either for news as news, or for the general public. He dealt, nine times out of ten, and with a joyous wit and humor no other man ever rivaled, with just such tales of the little world of the New York newspapers themselves as this I had given him; or at widest with the Broadway restaurant, theater, and press-agent world with which the inner newspaper world was interwoven.

It was enough for him to bask in the applause and affection of the people to whom in turn his own love was most fully given; the men and women of his own craft. And both applause and affection, for ample reason, were always his — I think in greater measure than was ever won by any other man in New York's newspaper history. Not until he had reached a time of life at which most writers' best work is behind them did he finally realize more widely (not more fully) on his unique gifts; venture to deal, with as much success as in the small world he had so long made his own, with a broader field; and find the larger audience he should long before have had.

And if Frank O'Malley rather victimized me in the canal boat atrocity case, many times afterward he more than made amends. Probably the greatest service he ever did me was in connection with Madame Vandervelde's visit to America.

She was the wife of a high Belgian official who came to this country, early in the war, to appeal for help for her suffering countrymen; and the *World*, because of various favors her husband had done our Belgian correspondent, was anxious to assist her in every way it could.



My assignment was to arrange a suitable public reception for her; recruit in advance an imposing committee of volunteer helpers (always an easy task when the ladies approached can be promised that they'll see their names prominently in print); and schedule at least a preliminary series of public meetings at which she might tell New York, and through New York the country, of her country's plight. All that was easy enough; but it was also part of my duty to meet the lady on her arrival and secure the first interview with her; and that was my undoing.

Her steamer arrived in the early morning, and it was arranged for me to go down the bay on the revenue cutter, with the customs men and the regular ship news reporters, and, by special permission of the Collector of the Port, greet Madame Vandervelde at Quarantine.

But the revenue cutter left the Battery at 6.30 A.M., and — neither for the first time nor for the last — the task of getting up so early in the morning proved too much for me. I did manage by heroic efforts to meet the steamer at the pier, was graciously received by Madame Vandervelde, and carried through the rest of my program successfully. None the less I had missed one of the spectacular features of my story; and I was wondering how I would explain to Boss Clarke, when by great good luck I encountered Frank O'Malley.

He also, it developed, had been assigned to meet Madame Vandervelde at Quarantine, and had easily reached the cutter on time by his usual expedient in such cases — he stayed up all night.

I can see him now, responding to my appeal for a 'cover-up' on my failure to carry out that part of my assignment; short and stocky, yet with that tremendous,

almost arrogant dignity whose secret is solely reserved to Irishmen; immaculately tailored in light gray, his square, ruddy face clean-shaven save for the little fair moustache; his austere expression eternally belied by the dancing eyes.

‘Who dares to say you didn’t board that ship at Quarantine?’ he demanded truculently. ‘With my own eyes didn’t I see you climb the ladder to the liner’s deck, the only woman in history, save Alice Roosevelt, to perform that feat, begad! I can produce ten witnesses to swear that they saw you, too; and the *Sun* tomorrow will carry the story of the woman reporter who met the ship at Quarantine; it will so. It is Frank O’Malley, young woman, who pledges it!’

And it was as he said; and only now that the dear old *World* has gone to join the old *Sun*, and Frank O’Malley too, God rest him! has passed to his own reward, may anybody still living who remembers or cares learn that one of my most spectacular and celebrated feats — was never performed at all.

## VI

Somehow that time I ‘nearly’ boarded a ship at Quarantine is linked in my mind with the time, that same autumn, I ‘nearly’ made my first flight in an airplane.

A lad named Burnside was at this time one of the most conspicuous of the genial young lunatics who in those days used light-heartedly to break their necks at county fairs in paper-and-sticks contraptions in whose tiny open ticket-like seats today’s aviators would hardly dare sit still upon the ground. He was promoting a new flying-boat.

Somehow he or his manager contrived to persuade Admiral Peary, whose fame as discoverer of the North Pole was then still fairly fresh, to come down to Long Beach, Long Island, and make a flight with him. Then they also persuaded the *World* to send its woman reporter to do the same, and to write the tale of her sensations — assuming she came down alive.

Then they decided that it would make a better story if he flew out to sea with me, located the British cruiser that at that time was picketing the mouth of New York harbor just outside the three-mile limit, and swooped down and dropped some newspapers on her decks. With the frail machine he had, and especially with its single temperamental motor, that was an utterly harebrained scheme. Fortunately I was in those days serenely and totally ignorant of the perils it involved.

I suspect, though, that the Admiral and I were each equally willing to let the other have the honor of the first flight. But being neither an admiral nor a famous explorer, and consequently having no public reputation for daring to sustain, I had all the best of it tactically. Presently, therefore, he clambered impressively into the craft, and with a sputtering roar away they went.

They got up a thousand feet or so, made two wide circles above our heads, and were heading out to sea when the engine abruptly stopped. Young Burnside hung manfully to his controls and got out of his first sideslip; but in doing so he nosed over a little too far, and hit the Atlantic with a robust splash which must have nearly snapped both his own and his passenger's spines, as well as narrowly missing taking them right on down to the bottom.

Several spectators scrambled into a rowboat, pulled

out to them and towed them in. The engine, to my secret relief, proved to be hopelessly crippled; there would be no more flights that day.

They hauled the flying-boat up on the beach; everybody swarmed eagerly around.

'Are you hurt, Admiral?' asked somebody, fatuously.

'No,' said Peary. 'Why?'

'Well, that was pretty close to a smashup.'

'Was it?' said the North Pole's discoverer, not a flicker on his weather-beaten iron countenance. 'I thought that was the way they always came down.'

Burnside, and still more his press-agent and manager — all the men in aviation in those days, it seems to me, were harum-scarum, irresponsible, and tremendously likeable kids — were heartbroken at the seeming collapse of the project to fly out over the British cruiser, which their eager imaginations had already built into a first-page feature next morning. And their woe at last prevailed upon me to such a point that, to console them, I promised to write the story in a way to give the impression, without actually saying so, that I had at least gone up for a short flight before the Admiral's mishap.

It is characteristic of the change in the customs of newspaper work that it was only a short, third-person story. In fact, I do not remember more than three occasions on which I was told to write my story in the first person, and was given a 'by-line.' What is more, the first time that 'by-line' itself said only 'By a Woman Reporter for the *World*,' and I didn't even attain to that until I had been a member of the staff for several years and had done a great many more things than the few I have been setting down here. And the second time they told me to sign my story, I myself was suddenly seized with

the idea that it was forward and 'unladylike,' and eventually took refuge behind a pseudonym.

On that particular occasion, too, I had been out picketing with the striking New York garment-workers, and had had a wonderful time sassing policemen and defying the strike-breaking gorillas, until I finally succeeded in getting myself arrested — with an unpleasant surprise resulting for the cop who had thought he was only taking in a particularly obstreperous striker.

But the pre-war proprieties were never more beautifully illustrated than in that story which was signed only 'By a Woman Reporter.' For that was the account, written by herself, of the first woman ever to see a prizefight in New York, and of her impressions of the manners and customs of the ring. It is worth recalling now, if only for the sake of describing the comically elaborate precautions both the *World* and the Madison Square Garden management considered necessary before such a daring feat could be undertaken.

Young Mike Donovan was to box ten rounds in the old Garden (the one that really was on Madison Square) with Mike Gibbons; and, believe it or not, to permit me to see it they completely boarded up one of the center balcony boxes overlooking the ring, with only narrow peep-holes for my use and that of the staff artist who accompanied me and made sketches to illustrate my story.

I was literally smuggled into the Garden by a private door, securely hidden in my harem-box — in fact, locked in it for greater safety — at least half an hour before the crowd was admitted; and there I stayed until the whole evening's program was over and the Garden completely cleared, when it was considered safe to smuggle me out again.

But my story was acclaimed as a daring bit of realism. Our sports editor told me it was 'a classic of prize-ring literature'; and the feat itself was a newspaper sensation. My actual name wasn't signed to it, the managing editor explained, to protect me from the unpleasant criticism such a story was certain to arouse. As a matter of fact there was never a peep of protest.

Characteristically, the *World* tried to repeat its first success by sending me, a few months later, to a second fight to try again; but the second story wasn't nearly so good a piece either of writing or reporting. One prize-fight was a novelty, the second was a bore; I have never had the slightest desire to see a third.

I have, it seems to me, seen so many things infinitely more real and more humanly interesting, not to say exciting. So many more vivid pictures throng to mind of my fellow-creatures in the act of dealing, as best they could according to their natures, with the real and amazingly varied problems life had presented to them, that in comparison prizefights are dull affairs.

I see again the stunned red face and open mouth of the big policeman who was trying desperately to hold back a solid mass of people on Broadway, behind the fire-lines surrounding the blazing furnace of the Equitable Building in which five firemen had gone to their deaths, when the young woman in the champagne-colored velvet dress and picture hat ducked under his arm, waved a police card under his nose, and ran straight across the street to the point where Chief Kenlon himself was directing the battle — and from which, incidentally, Chief Kenlon sent her ignominiously back again.

I see again Mrs. Oliver Hazard Perry Belmont, four and a half feet of outraged but slightly rotund dignity,

imperiously summoning her footmen to 'remove this creature!' And the soft, gentle, and kindly face of 'Mother' Jones, patiently recounting the wrongs of the striking Colorado miners. And Gertrude Atherton accepting a special assignment to report the trial of Mrs. Carman for murder, provided the *World* would absolutely guarantee that she didn't have to pass through a tunnel on her way to and from the Long Island courtroom. And Mrs. Carman herself, insolently facing down a hostile courtroom.

Then there is Theodore Roosevelt coming up Sagamore Hill surrounded by his sons; looking up to see his wife and myself sitting on the porch, waving his hat and breaking boyishly into a run. And that captain in the fire department whose daughter had eloped, waddling in, clad chiefly in his red flannel underwear, to defy the meddling reporter — only to sit down suddenly and burst into wild sobs, so that tears dripped from the ends of his enormous bristling moustache.

All this and hundreds of incidents more, things tragic and hilarious, pathetic and grotesque, but all integral manifestations of that hodgepodge we call humanity, went to make up the New York that was; the New York I knew so well; the New York, above all, that I loved. The New York in which I once was young.

# 10

## EXIT — INTO LIFE

### I

CUB reporters, on the old *World*, were a dime a dozen — indeed they were scarcely that. By the time I myself had been on the staff a year, and therefore considered myself a veteran, I had already seen several successive droves of promising youths pour into the city room, only in a few short weeks or months to vanish one and all. As it became evident that this was a continuous process, attempts to identify the individual units of the ever-passing swarms seemed less and less worth bothering about.

But in the fall of 1912 one of that season's crop of cubs began imperceptibly and inexplicably to emerge from the anonymous horde, and to take on, for me, the aspect of an individual annoyance. It is still hard to say how he managed it. His manners were faultless — by city room standards perhaps a shade too faultless. He was in no way conspicuous, and therefore managed to be conspicuously inconspicuous among a group of youngsters of whom all the others were striving desperately each to draw attention to himself.

In spite of himself, I think, he radiated a supreme self-confidence which I felt intuitively, and repaid with dis-



like all the greater because it did not show itself in anything you really could take hold of. There was no single unpleasant trait by which you could label and dismiss him. So my dislike of him grew with my resentment at my own inability to give definite reasons to myself for disliking him.

Who, thought I, does the young man think he is? He is neither as tall nor anywhere near as good-looking as Charley Hand. He's tall and well-made enough, and dresses fairly well; but he's miles from Sam Fisher's superbly casual perfection of attire. And yet in the very way he walks in in the morning you can see that he's quite sure that he's one of the lords of creation.

Some of the older men on the staff, I found, had also noticed the young man; and with no particular love. But dispassionate fairness was one of that old *World* staff's great qualities. They told me he wasn't a very good reporter; he was too trusting and too easy to fool. But he certainly could write.

Billy Beazell, whose desk was next to mine, and whose own friendly interest in cubs was inexhaustible, gave me part of the clue to the puzzle.

This particular boy had been an officer in the Navy. His health had compelled him to give up the sea, and he had resigned his commission. He had, while still in the service, written occasionally for *Harper's Weekly* and the *Outlook*. Van Harwood was a cousin of his and had helped him to get his chance on the *World*.

That, undeniably, both improved him vastly in my eyes, and whetted my curiosity. We had plenty of aspiring writers; I myself was one. But very few had actually had anything published in any magazine, and those who had were never backward about letting every-

body else know about it. A boy who had had some stories published in weekly magazines, and yet never said anything about it, was a new and interesting phenomenon. To have him, besides, a naval officer, added still another exciting touch.

Naval officers, in fact, I suddenly realized, constituted perhaps the only distinct type of male regarding which, after my years behind a news-stand and as a newspaper woman, my ignorance remained virtually complete. I began to look forward to finding out what they were really like. I also perceived that part, at least, of what I had thought his utterly cocksure air had a better explanation. I know now, from wider acquaintance still, what it really was — that mark the quarterdeck puts on even the mildest, gentlest-mannered man, which he never can thereafter put off again entirely, through all the rest of his life.

With this much explanation, and with the further assurance of veteran judges that a boy who could write as well as this one could was practically certain to be with us for a long time to come, I was prepared to be at least a trifle friendly. It was all the more disconcerting to find that the party of the other part had, all this time, had ideas of his own about that.

I began, to make up for any slight injustice toward him of which I might have been guilty, by putting a little extra warmth into the smile that went with my 'Good-morning' when it came around to him. But! — 'Good-morning,' said he, quite pleasantly, but never said anything more. He didn't in any way actively rebuff me; but he seemed entirely sufficient to himself — not only scarcely aware of my existence, but annoyingly cheerful in his self-chosen isolation.

Now this I must admit I didn't like. It wasn't that I was exactly suffering for masculine attention. But the very contrast between the many who seemed to find my society agreeable enough, and the sole anomaly who apparently lacked any taste at all for it, made the puzzle constantly more irritating. In fact it became so irritating that I decided to see what I could extract from Van Harwood that might help me to clear it up.

But you could not beat about the bush with Van — he was a *World* reporter himself, and had been one too long to be easily fooled. I dropped three or four carefully casual sentences about his young cousin and their common Vermont background—'I've never been in Vermont,' said I, with the wide-eyed innocence that at other times had served me well, but which Van Harwood, unfortunately, had too often himself observed in action. 'What is it really like?' Thereupon Van hitched himself forward in his chair, shot his head forward at me, and with shrewd eyes and hawk-face boring into mine, demanded: 'Young woman, just what are your intentions?'

I found myself utterly speechless, and felt myself color to the roots of my hair.

'Well, I'll tell you what you want to know,' he continued mercilessly. 'I know that boy. I know his father and his mother and sister and brothers. I've known them, and they've known me, all our lives and for ten generations before that. He and his family are all alike; you'll never make a mistake about a single one of them.'

'They always make good husbands, but they never by any chance ever make any money. You can just make up your mind on that basis. If you want a rich husband, pass him up. Get away from him before it's

too late — if it isn't too late already. But if you want a *good* husband, grab him quick before somebody else does.'

Never in my life had anybody talked to me like that. I sought furiously for sufficiently scathing words, but they refused to come. Seething, I rose and stalked back to my own desk, pursued by Van Harwood's satanic chuckle.

## II

Then came New Year's Eve; the boisterous, hilarious, rowdy, and deafening New Year of Little Old New York. I had been invited to join a party to take in the spectacle. We were to meet at the office of Arthur Ryan, press-agent of the old Hippodrome; and I was considerably disconcerted when I walked in and found myself face to face with — Van Harwood's annoying cousin. It seemed that he and Arthur were old friends. He stood up, and as usual smiled pleasantly and never said one word. But when we headed over toward Broadway, where the wild blare of horns and general hullabaloo was already mounting to the sky, I found him walking beside me.

Silent men are never easy to deal with — silent men, not dumb ones; the distinction is an immensely important one. I found myself, to my own surprise, beginning to chatter busily; trying to make him talk, and unreasonably gratified when I began gradually to win a measure of success. He had the most superbly uncompromising Yankee twang that ever emerged from any human throat; but I found that even that could be endured.

He wouldn't say much about the Navy; but unlike Van, he was quite willing to talk about Vermont.

Three or four days later another phenomenon occurred. It was just before six o'clock, my quitting time, when the boy who had never before come near me arose and walked purposefully around into my aisle. I became totally absorbed in winding up my day's work, but I watched his approach through the back of my head.

'Tomorrow is my day off, and I have two tickets to *Fanny's First Play*,' I presently heard him say. 'May I ask if you would care to see it? Might I have the privilege of taking you?'

That, I'm inclined to think now, was my last chance to snub him once for all. Ever since then it's always been too late. But I didn't realize my opportunity in time to do me any good. I was indeed a trifle surprised to find myself accepting his invitation, but I did; and the following evening that quiet young man and I saw, together, Bernard Shaw's *Fanny's First Play*.

The play, however, was very much less important than what went on between the acts, and on the way home afterward. For during those intervals I managed at last to explain to my escort how thoroughly I disliked him, and why; and was enormously disconcerted to learn that he disapproved of me with equal thoroughness, and to hear, with dismay, his reasons, which he set forth with great particularity.

I was, it seemed, a mere spoiled and heedless child. I took constant, unfair advantage of my personal charm and of the fact that I was a girl. I was frivolous, flirtatious, and provocative; and I put too much make-up on.

After that, I can see now, it was hopeless. It took us another year of increasingly ardent mutual criticism

and recrimination, and progressively clearer and more eloquent mutual explanations of the grounds for our mutual disapproval. But after that evening there was only one way for it to come out — in the way it did when one morning we two walked together into Boss Clarke's private office, and confessed that we had been married some three months previously.

Of course this doesn't even pretend to be the real story of what happened between us two. That is one story, I have just discovered, that it is quite beyond me to write. Nor am I going to try to tell anything of the twenty years we two have shared since then. They have proved vastly more important to me than the ones I have told about here; that's probably why I find I can't talk about them.

I can't, to tell the truth, see any need of my doing so. Those who themselves are happily married already know everything about it they'll ever need to know; and those who aren't would never understand what I was talking about, anyway. Indeed, the subject never need have been brought up, if there hadn't seemed to be a call to explain how the life and work I have been describing came to a logical end.

The work, by 1916, no longer was the same. Interest in the kinds of news I was chiefly fitted to procure was withering daily, in the *World* office itself, under the heat of war. With still another new career — as different from each of those that had preceded it as they had all differed from each other — opening before me, I no longer had much heart for the petty round of trifling assignments that had become a woman reporter's portion.

This has been, from first to last, no more than an

attempt to set down what I saw and heard, and felt and did and was, in a world that began to die in 1914, and in 1917 vanished utterly. So here this story necessarily stops.

There were, as I have tried to show, in that world many things that were deplorable, and also many things entirely fine and worth remembering. But I do not find that in recalling them now, I have any regrets whatever, either in any particular case, or with regard to that world in its entirety. Nor would I, if I could, bring any part of that old world back again. For by virtue of one fact, this new world, for all its harshness, belongs to me in a deeper sense than ever its absurd and lovable predecessor did.

That one fact is that I have a son.

THE END









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